Let Fear Propel You Forward

Breeze of Summoners

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This story was first published on December 17th, 2003, and was last updated on November 23rd, 2004.

FicLab ID: Lrlw8kcc/lrklcy64/50000E5U

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Summary

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title	Let Fear Propel You Forward
author	Breeze of Summoners
source	https://www.fanfiction.net/s/1644744/
published	December 17th, 2003
updated	November 23rd, 2004
words	91,064
chapters	27
status	Abandoned
rating	Fiction T
tags	Abandoned, Fanfiction, Final Fantasy IX, Fratley, Games

Description:

Fratley's biography... Written in first person! Excerpt: ... "I see that you survived the tragedy at Burmecia... Erm, or at least physically."... Chapter Five of Part Two Up

Part One, Chapter One

Chapter One
Early Days, Early Times

The very first signs of morning saw not a group of sleeping children at our house, but rather two sleeping children and a third who woke in two seconds. As if I could sense the first rays of dawn streaking over areas of true light, my eyes first flickered open at dawn. From that point I would not spend four minutes getting out of bed, but rather spend four seconds leaping out of the bed and onto all fours. I may have been four, but I still wasn't pleased with the idea on walking on my hind legs. My arms were too long and clumsy to keep me comfortable. So I simply walked like a dog on all fours over to the door, which was open just a crack. I pushed it open with my snout and walked out into the hallway.

I ignored my father, Aireff, who was humming some long-lost tune as he searched around for something to eat. I instead bounded across the hallway into my parent's room, where my mother Rose was sleeping. She wouldn't be sleeping for long. I made a running jump straight onto the bed, startling her, and then

walked onto her chest.
“Morning!” I shouted. “Morning, morning, morning, morning!”
It was the latest word I had learned. Rose groaned sleepily.
“Morning!” I shouted. “Ya awake! Morning, morning, morning!”
Slowly Rose opened her eyes. I soon recognized the purple irises as she stared at me with sleepy annoyance.
“Fratley, go back to sleep,” Rose groaned.
“Mamá, it morning! Morning, morning!” I chirped. ‘Get up!’
“Fratley, ya are supposed to sleep in the morning. Go to bed,” Rose groaned.
I began to jump up and down. “Get up!”
With a frustrated groan, Rose shoved me off the bed. I landed on the floor with a thud. This didn’t faze me. I simply jumped right back on her chest, taking away her breath, and put my face an inch from hers.
“Get up! Morning, morning, morning, morning!” I chirped.
“Dear lord. Aireff, would ya please come and rid me of this child?” Rose asked.
I at first cringed at my mother’s sudden raise in voice and leapt backward, thinking she was yelling at me. Then I realized she was calling for my father

and I leapt back to my original position. I heard a laugh coming from the kitchen. Someone appeared in the doorway.

“Come on, Fratley, let’s go. Ya caused ye mother enough aggravation when ya were two,” Aireff said as he walked over.

I immediately turned around.

“Morning, morning, morning, morning, morning!” I chirped.

“They were your idea,” Rose groaned.

Aireff laughed. “Ya will be able ta sleep, don’ ya worry. Come on, Fratley, why don’t ya come with me ta the store?”

“Go to Alexandria,” Rose muttered.

I jumped onto my father’s shoulder and soon had myself comfortable.

“I’m not goin’ ta Alexandria, sweet. But don’ worry, I’ll keep ’im quiet,” Aireff assured my mother.

Rose nodded sleepily. She had already closed her eyes. Aireff left the room and picked up a pouch on the kitchen counter. He then headed down the stairs and outside.

I loved it when I was taken outside. All the sights caught my attention, and I wanted to touch everything. It annoyed Rose, and eventually Aireff got tired of it as well, but it was my nature. Aireff walked down the street, with me on his shoulder.

Some Burmecians were already outside. The streets would be packed by noon. The rain was a steady drizzle. The October weather was pleasant. I marveled at the many sights, and I was silent, for once.

Aireff walked through a small gate leading to a bunch of houses near the outskirts of the castle. Already there was a buzz of activity. The inhabitants of the houses were frantically setting up shops. Aireff began to look at some of the items set up. Soon he leaned too close and I nabbed one. It was a shiny orb, and I marveled at it.

“Fratley, put that back,” Aireff demanded in a sharp voice.

I sheepishly returned the orb to its original place.

“Hello Aireff,” the shop owner said, turning around. ‘Can I help you with anything.’

“What is this orb?” Aireff asked, picking up the shiny orb I had snatched.

“Oh, that.” The shop owner smiled as he walked over. ‘That is said to be a magical orb with the ability to tell the future. They are very durable and make fine decorations. Being knocked down won’t make them break.’

“How much is it?” Aireff asked as I stared at the orb eagerly.

“300 Gil,” the shop owner replied.

Aireff took out three gold Gil coins and gave them to the shopkeeper. He then gave me the orb as he walked off.

“That’s for listenin’,” he said simply.

I stared at the orb, enchanted by it. I didn’t notice anything else Aireff was doing because I had my orb. It was silver and had a smoky texture, and this texture seemed to move. I stared at it, mouth agape.

“Fratley, ya look ridiculous,” Aireff said with a chuckle.

I quickly closed my mouth, but I continued to marvel at the orb. What was that smoky stuff? Thousands of crazy possibilities rolled into my head. None of them made any sense. It didn’t matter.

Suddenly a scream pierced the cool morning air, making my ears sting. I looked up, startled. Immediately Aireff’s head whipped in the direction of the scream. Everyone else, including me, also looked in the same direction. I whimpered nervously.

“Papá?” I whimpered.

Something wasn’t right. I could feel it. Aireff’s muscles tensed as he took me from his shoulder. He was still staring in the direction the scream had come from.

“Do you want to come with me?” Aireff asked me.

My father’s familiar accent was gone, and it made

me nervous. I nodded feebly, not wanting to leave him. He held me in his arms, and suddenly we were in a strange, dark world. I cuddled myself close to him, terrified. Sparkly balls of light were in the sky, and the familiar rain I had lived with was gone. I whimpered nervously and didn't notice Aireff moving briskly through the area. Then, suddenly, I felt Aireff falling. We were being sucked in! I whimpered, staring up at Aireff's face. Wasn't he going to do something?

Suddenly we were back in Burmecia, and I could feel the familiar rain. I could hear, however, snarling and terrified crying. I didn't dare look in the direction of the noises. Soon, Aireff had placed me on a flat, large windowsill.

"Fratley, stay there. Don't move, okay?" Aireff commanded. He sounded worried.

I nodded nervously and watched my father head in the direction of the noises. I was horrified. There was a massive black and orange dog, and it was attacking a little girl! I crawled close to the window, not wanting to be seen. My eyes were wide with fear. I watched Aireff take out a strange smooth stick with a pointy piece of metal at the top. He then rushed forward and knocked the dog away from the girl with it.

The dog snarled angrily as it stared at my father.

Aireff twirled the lance and caught the dog in the jaw. It snarled and tried to attack Aireff, but it missed as Aireff dodged. Not daring to watch, I turned my attention to the little girl. She was huddled in a ball, and I could see some strange red liquid on her. I recognized it as a weird liquid that had come out when I cut myself on glass once. But there had only been a little bit then. It was everywhere on this girl.

Suddenly I felt the window opening behind him. I leapt down from the windowsill and over to the girl. I stopped a few feet away. She was shaking madly, and I didn't like the red liquid. I began to approach, but then the dog let out a large snarl. I yelped with terror and bounded into the nearest alley. It was cramped, but I soon found a box to hide in. Nervously I watched for anything dangerous. I heard yelps, and I closed my eyes.

Suddenly the yelps ended, and I heard something running toward the alley. I opened my eyes, and I saw long paws and lanky legs. I knew it was the dog. I heard it sniff the air, then I saw it come towards me. It stuck its nose in the box. That was when I screamed and smacked it.

The dog yelped from the hit, then snarled angrily as I scrambled from the box and began to run. I could hear it chase after me. Soon, I stumbled over a rock

and slammed to the ground. The dog leapt in the air, and I screamed.
Suddenly the dog was flying straight into a wall. Aireff came into my view. He looked over at me.
“Fratley! Get out of ’ere! Go that way!” Aireff shouted, motioning behind him.
I scampered to my feet and ran frantically in the indicated direction. I soon emerged from the alley. A woman was hugging the terrified girl. I could see no one else around. I heard a yelp from the dog in the alley, and I looked nervously in that direction to see Aireff leap straight out of the alley and right in front of me. The dog ran forward and snarled. Aireff picked me up and backed away slowly. The dog snarled again, then bounded back into the alley.
Aireff placed me on the ground, and for a split-second I was fearful that he would start yelling.
“Are ya all right?” Aireff asked. His accent was back, making me feel a little more secure.
I nodded, still expecting a scolding.
“That’s good,” Aireff said, patting me on the head. He then looked over at the woman and the girl. ‘She all right?’
“I don’t think so,” the woman said with sorrow, staring at the injured girl. “I hope Junes will have a look at her.”
Aireff walked a few feet forward and knelt down.

He held out his hand toward the injured girl and snapped his fingers. Immediately the girl looked up and stared at him with green eyes. I bounded over and stared curiously. Why had my father done that?
“She’ll be all right. A quick look over is all that’s needed,” Aireff said. “’Ello, little one.”
The girl stared at Aireff curiously.
“She doesn’t talk much,” the woman said. “Come on, say your name.”
The girl looked up at the woman, then back over at Aireff.
“Freya,” she said, pointing to herself.
Aireff nodded. “Ya stay out of trouble, Freya.”
Freya nodded. I stared at her curiously, but I didn’t go over to her. The red liquid still scared me. The woman rose, holding Freya in her arms. Aireff also rose, and I jumped onto his shoulder in the process.
“We’ll be goin’. ‘Ope ye child gets bette’, Marie,” Aireff said to the woman.
Marie nodded. “Thank you.”
Marie rushed off quickly. Relieved that Freya and the strange liquid had left, I quickly realized my orb was missing.
“Papá, m’ orb! M’ orb!” I wailed.
“Oh, ’ush, Fratley. We’ll find ye orb,” Aireff said with reassurance. He scanned the floor. “See? ’Ere it is!”

Aireff knelt down and picked up the orb, which was unharmed. I let out a cry of glee and took the orb. I stared at it eagerly. Aireff laughed, and the familiar sound made me feel even more secure. Aireff picked up the bag that I hadn't even noticed he had put down, and he began to head in the direction of home. I was too concerned with my orb. I did notice when Aireff entered the house though. I immediately came to attention as Aireff walked up the stairs. I could smell food from upstairs, and I could hear the voices of my siblings.

"'Ello, sweet," Aireff said to Rose as she came into view. "Did ya get any sleep?"

Rose looked over at us. "An hour. Then the other rascals woke up."

Aireff laughed as I leapt from his shoulder. I put my orb down and bounded over to my siblings.

"'Ello!" I chirped.

"Ello!" my siblings Ruben and Angela chirped.

"What that?" Angela asked, pointing to my orb.

"I no know," I replied, grabbing the orb.

"Ooooooooo." Angela and Ruben said, staring at the orb.

Aireff laughed. "Lunatics."

"Little kids are like crows," Rose commented. 'They love shiny objects.'

"Especially if they can eat 'em," Aireff said, rolling

his eyes.
“Even if they can’t, they try!” Rose laughed.
At this point the smoke in the orb turned blue. We all gasped with awe and continued to stare. Aireff laughed, while I heard Rose return to cooking.
“So, what took you so long?” Rose asked.
“That little girl — Freya, I think ’er name is? — anyway, she was attacked by that doberman,” Aireff explained.
“The one in the alleys?” Rose asked, and I heard her surprise.
“Yes,” Aireff replied.
“Oh my God! Is she all right?” Rose asked, and the worry in her voice made my siblings and I look up with confusion.
“I think she’ll be fine. A little bloodied but that’s ’bout it,” Aireff said with reassurance.
“A little bloodied? Aireff, was she ’urt badly? And did Fratley see?” Rose asked.
“Well, she was fairly injured, but she perked right up when I snapped my fingers. As for Fratley, yes, he saw it, and he nearly got attacked.”
“WHAT?” Rose screamed, causing my siblings and I to bound out of the room and into our bedroom.
“Calm down, sweet, ’e’s fine,” I heard Aireff say as I hid under the covers of my bed.
“It’s bad enough that ’e saw the violence and blood.

’E didn’t ’ave to be part of it!” Rose wailed.
“‘Ush, Rose, ye are going to ’ave the neighbors over. Kids remember what they want ta remember, and I ’ighly doubt Fratley is goin’ ta want ta remember this,” Aireff said soothingly.
“Aireff. Aireff, kids sometimes remember things when least expected. What if. What if?” Rose’s voice sounded choked, and I could hear sobbing. I came out from under the covers, and my siblings watched.
“What ya do?” Ruben asked.
“Mamá.” I tried to figure out what I was trying to say. “Mamá.”
What word did Rose always say when I was sobbing? I couldn’t remember.
“Mamá mad!” Angela chirped.
“No, Mamá no mad.” I said, and the word suddenly came to me. “Mamá c. cw. cwy. Mamá cwy, Mamá no mad, Mamá sad.”
I bounded out of the room, hearing Rose sob. I carefully walked in the kitchen, and found my beliefs to be true. I could see that Rose’s cheeks were wet, and Aireff looked pretty concerned.
“Mamá?” I asked.
Rose looked up and stared at me. Not hearing a shout, I walked over to her. I rose to my hind legs, though it was rather uncomfortable.

“Mamá no cwy! Fratley no bad. Mamá no cwy! Mamá no cwy!” I told Rose.
Rose’s eyes widened with complete shock. Aireff looked pretty stunned too. Rose knelt down to my level and stared at me. She took a deep breath.
“Fratley.” It was all she got out before she grabbed me in a choking hug and cried.
Yet somehow I knew the tears were now of happiness.

——— First chapter! You like, yes? I hope you do. I’m sure you figured out that Fratley is only four in this chapter ;) The next few chapters will skip around in the years until Fratley’s around 13 or so because then he — I mean I — will have more to tell. Please review!

This story is copyright to my imagination. The characters and world are copyright to SquareEnix, as if Final Fantasy IX in general. Many events I had to think up of, so if you don’t like some of the things, well. So be it =)

Chapter Two

Chapter Two
Rivalry & Broken Ice

Three years later saw me waking up at dawn but not torturing my poor mother. I woke up a little more slowly, but was still up within seconds. I immediately checked to make sure Angela was not in need a smack across the shoulders. She was terribly ill, and had been for years. Sometimes during the night her throat would get clogged and only a quick smack could clear it. Being the first one to rise besides Aireff, I had chosen to take the responsibility of caring for her. She had been ill for so long that I simply had grown used to the chore.
Thankfully, Angela was doing fine, though I could here sniffling as she breathed. I walked out of the room, but at this point I was comfortable on my hind legs. I completely ignored my parents' room and instead headed straight into the kitchen.
"Mornin', Fratley," Aireff said.
"Mornin'," I said simply, and I immediately began to rummage for food.
"Fratley, why can't ya wait for ye mothe' ta wake up?" Aireff asked me.

“‘Cause I’m hungry an’ I can’t wait. Not m’ fault,” I replied.
“Well, maybe ya should take ye mind off ye stomach for a little while an’ look outside,” Aireff told me.
“All right, whateve’ ya say,” I commented, heading down the stairs.
I opened the door leading into the house, and found myself faced with a white wonder. Burmecia was covered in a soft yet thick layer of white, glistening snow. Instead of rain, snow fell from the sky endlessly. I let out a cry of delight as I closed the door and ran up the stairs.
“It snowed! It snowed! Does that mean we get to go to the lake, huh huh huh? Does it, does it?” I asked eagerly, my voice temporarily turning to a normal Burmecian accent.
Aireff laughed. “Calm down, ya lunatic. I’m not the one that makes that decision. Ya will ‘ave to ask ye mothe’ when she wakes up.”
“She’s not goin’ ta wake up for another hour! Can’t I wake ’er up now?” I asked, my voice returning to the accent I had inherited from my father.
Aireff laughed again. “An’ ‘ave ’er screamin’? Nah, let ’er sleep.”
“Who’s talking about someone screaming?” Ruben asked as he entered the room, yawning. Unlike me, he had a Burmecian accent, plain and simple.

“It snowed! I want ta wake up mamá ta see if we can go ta the lake, but papá doesn’t want ‘er screamin’ in the mornin’,” I explained.
Ruben laughed heartily. “And I don’t either! When she screams, lord, does she scream!”
“Angela all right?” Aireff asked Ruben.
“Yes, she’s as all right as she can get. A little clogged, but she’s still breathing fine,” Ruben replied.
Aireff nodded. “That’s good. Either of you want some tea?”
Ruben nodded while I made a face.
“Ew, no thank ya,” I said with disgust.
Aireff laughed. “Ya will like it someday, I’m tellin’ ya.”
“Maybe, but I know I don’ like it now,” I retorted.
Ruben laughed lightly. “You’re amazing, Fratley. Always have something to say, no matter how dumb it is.”
I stuck my tongue out at him. He only rolled his eyes and accepted a hot mug of tea from Aireff. He sat at the mahogany table, sipping the tea. I also sat down at the table, but I wasn’t there for long. I soon had to stand up and begin pacing.
“Oh, Fratley. Can’t ya stay still?” Aireff asked.
“I want mamá ta wake up,” I moaned.
Suddenly great coughing was heard from the

children's bedroom. Angela had clearly woken up. We were all tense, hoping she would stop coughing and come in. Soon, the hacking ceased, and a red-faced Angela came in.
"Morning," she hacked out with a cough.
"Here," Aireff said, handing her some of tea.
Angela took the tea. "Thank you." She stumbled over to the table and sat down on the nearest chair. She took a big gulp of the tea despite its heat. The tea washed away any pesky glucose that refused to leave her throat. She let out a gasp and began to pant. This was a good sign.
"Hope I didn't wake up mamá," Angela said between gasps.
"I doubt it," Aireff said with encouragement. 'She sleeps like a log.'
"Bummer," I muttered.
"Hush, Fratley," Ruben snapped, grinning.
A brief silence of about 30 seconds followed before I sighed.
"That's it! I'm wakin' 'er up," I declared.
"Oh no ye don'!" Aireff cried, grabbing me by the arm and pulling me back. 'Let the poor woman sleep for goodness sake.'
"How? Ya are all so noisy," Rose commented as she entered the room.
"'Ello, Rose. Sorry we all woke ya up. Fratley's

excited ’bout the snow,” Aireff explained.
“Snow?” Angela asked. “You never mentioned snow.” She then let out a series of coughs.
Ruben gave Angela a light smack across the back, ceasing her coughing.
“Thank you,” Angela muttered with a final hack.
Rose had been watching Angela with concern.
“If only Junes could do something. Dear God, why my child? Why mine?” Rose muttered softly under her breath, and though most of us didn’t hear her, I did.
“Mamá,” I said, trying to bring Rose off Angela’s hopeless condition. ‘It snowed! Does this mean we can go ta the lake?’
Rose’s eyes sparkled. “That depends on how deep the snow is. Is it deep?”
“Oh, no! There’s barely any out there,” I said, growing excited. “Oh, can we go? Please? Please?” I stretched the ‘e’ in the last word.
Rose laughed lightly. “Maybe. Give me time to think in the morning, would ya?”
Rose opened a cabinet and searched through it. She took out a loaf of bread.
“Can’t ya guys even make breakfast on your own?” Rose asked, tossing the loaf at Aireff’s head. Aireff dodged and Ruben caught the loaf.
“I didn’t know we had bread left,” Ruben

commented, breaking off a chunk.
“We have everything in here, you dipwads!” Rose replied. ‘Meat, bread, fruits, so forth!’
“But it’s dry,” Aireff complained.
“Then ya can go catch yourself a rabbit, skin it, and cook it yourself. All food’s dry, no matter what!” Rose retorted.
“She’s too crabby in the mornin’,” I muttered to Angela, who nodded with agreement.
“Hush, Fratley, she’ll hear you,” Ruben said suddenly, giving Angela the bread.
“I’m not hungry,” Angela said, which was typical. She gave the bread to me, and I took a huge chunk and gave the loaf to Aireff.
Aireff took a chunk and gave the last of the bread to Rose, who just began to eat the last of the loaf. She was watching Angela with concern. I was so excited that I didn’t notice anything. I knew Rose would let us go to the lake. She liked going there and chatting with others. Aireff liked to start snowball fights, so he would agree easily. Ruben loved holding races, and Angela enjoyed the fresh air, if anything.
“Well, about your question, Fratley,” Rose began, catching my attention immediately. “I really don’t know if Angela —”
“Mamá, I’ll be fine,” Angela interrupted. “I could use the fresh air, and I like to watch the other kids.”

Angela hated when Rose tried to keep her home. She didn't want the rest of us to miss out on the fun. She couldn't participate in any games because her legs had become so weak, and talking too much made her begin to cough, but she still desperately tried to be like the other kids. Indeed, she could play cards, and she was deadly at it, but her hands shook so much that sometimes she dropped the cards. Most kids avoided her except for her greatest friends and the nicest kids.

Rose sighed. "All right, then, yes, we can go."

"All right!" I shouted with a mouth full of food.

"FRATLEY! Ya won't be going anywhere with those manners!" Rose snapped immediately.

"Oops," I muttered, swallowing the food. "Sorry, mamá."

Ruben had leapt out of the chair, knocking it over, and headed into our room to change into clean clothes. Angela had risen to her feet slowly and limped shakily into the room as well. I soon followed her. We choose warm clothes and headed to different areas to change. Angela stayed in the room, while Ruben headed downstairs and I headed into our parents' room. We all changed as speedily as possible. I came out first, Ruben next, and Angela last. By then Rose had, thankfully, had some tea and was in a better mood. Aireff was talking quietly with

her, and none of us disturbed them. Angela immediately sat in the chair and took a pack of cards out of her pocket. She began to play solitaire. I paced around excitedly while Ruben merely yawned and got another mug of tea. At last, Rose left the room with Aireff, and they disappeared into the bedroom.

Three minutes later, Rose and Aireff reappeared in clean clothes. Ruben immediately put his tea aside while I stopped pacing and instead began to jump up and down with glee. Angela rose shakily to her feet.

“Well, you’re all ready, so I guess we’ll get moving,” Rose said.

I practically flew down the stairs and straight into the door. As I slammed into the door, I opened it, and flew straight to the ground. The Burmecians outside stared at me with confusion. I rose to my feet and waited eagerly for my slower family. Angela was getting a ride on Aireff’s shoulders, and Ruben was running so quickly that he crashed into me. We both fell to the ground. Rose shook her head with disbelief.

“Ya are all going to kill yourselves! Be careful!” she scolded with concern.

Ruben and I rose to our feet and began to race to the lake. We knew the way by heart. Sliding between people and charging through alleys, we raced far

ahead of the rest of the family. As we reached the gatehouse that led to the castle grounds, I made a running jump up the stairs and through a massive set of doors that led to the marketsquare. From there I headed in the direction of the castle. Before I reached the main gate, however, I was taking a sharp turn toward a gorgeous garden. The lake was in this direction. Soon, I could see its frozen surface, and the kids enjoying themselves skating barefoot on it. Groups of parents were talking casually, young children and babies by their sides. Three snowball fights had already been started.

“Awesome! Look at all the people on ice!” Ruben cried with delight as he at last caught up with me.

I watched Ruben rush down toward the lake. I followed my energetic brother and soon was hit by a snowball. Quickly I leapt to my feet.

“Fast recovery,” a blue-eyed boy with black hair commented. “Come here, kiddo. I want you to help me out.”

I walked over, curious.

“I’m Dan,” the boy said. ‘Who are you?’

“Fratley,” I replied.

Dan nodded. “Right. See, I got in a bit of an — eh — endless and hopeless fight. Perhaps you can help?”

I grew excited. “Sure! I love snowball fights.”

Dan smiled. “Yeah, well, let’s see if you like this one.”
Dan dodged a flying snowball. I grabbed some snow and began to pack it. As I was, I was hit in the head with a snowball. There was a rock in it! The rock left my head throbbing. I glared angrily at my opponent. What a cheater! You weren’t supposed to use rocks. My anger caused me to pack the snowball extra thick and hard. I then threw it at my opponent with so much speed that he couldn’t dodge. The snowball plowed into his face and knocked him straight over.
“Whoa!” Dan shouted, impressed.
Our opponent staggered to his feet, glaring angrily at me.
“You could’ve killed me!” he snarled angrily.
I couldn’t help but laugh.
“What ’bout ye rock?” I asked. ‘That can kill. I can’t.’
“What is the matter, Eroy?”
Dan and I both looked in the direction of the feminine voice to see a silver-haired girl approaching our opponent. To me she was oddly familiar, but I couldn’t remember why.
“That guy flapped me in the face with a snowball,” our opponent Eroy complained, pointing to me.
“Are you saying you can’t take a snowball to the

face?” the silver— haired girl asked.
“No!” Eroy retorted. ‘It’s just that he wasn’t playing fair!’
“What about ye rock?” I asked angrily.
“No putting rocks in snowballs,” the silver-haired girl told Eroy. She then turned to me. ‘And no throwing snowballs at other people’s faces.’
“Oh, aren’t ya the smart one,” I sneered. “Bet ya can’t even throw a snowball.”
The silver-haired girl’s eyes narrowed. “Don’t taunt me.”
“I wouldn’t,” Dan muttered to me. ‘Freya’s a deadly snowball player. She’ll wallop you.’
I ignored Dan. “So, you’re Freya?” I asked the silver-haired girl.
The silver-haired girl nodded.
“I’m Fratley,” I said, ‘and I challenge ya ta a snowball fight.’
“What’s in it for me?” Freya asked, though she seemed quite eager to simply get on with the snowball fight.
“Well,” I began, thinking the question over. ‘If ya win, I ’ave ta fight all snowball fights for ya when ye are challenged. If I win, it’s the opposite. Deal?’
Freya’s eyes sparkled with mischievous amusement as she smiled. “Deal.”
Immediately I knelt down and began packing

together some snow. Freya also packed together some snow, and she threw it before it was at a good size. The snowball hit my half-made snowball and made it fall apart. Mumbling to myself, I began to make another snowball. I tried to make it swiftly, but soon I was knocked onto my back by another snowball Freya had made in seconds. I leapt to my feet and threw my snowball at her. She dodged it easily and threw the one she had made while dodging. I was hit in the shoulder, but it didn't stop me from making the massive snowball I was creating.

Freya certainly wasn't a normal girl! Most of them despised snowball fights, and they were ditzy when they got in them. They'd rather play cards and talk about strange things. But Freya was not only willing to get into a snowball fight, she was a killer!

I threw my massive snowball at Freya, and she was plowed to the ground. At first I thought I had won, but then she kicked outward and plowed with me over with a bunch of snow. The two of us lay there.

"Draw," Eroy announced after five seconds.

Displeased, I rose to my feet. Freya also looked displeased, but the both of us both knew that that snowball fight had indeed been a draw, and nothing else. We both looked around, not daring to even glance at each other.

“Race,” Freya said suddenly.
“Race?” I asked.
“Look,” she said, pointing toward the ice. “A race. I wonder who will win?”
I looked in the direction she pointed and saw five boys sliding expertly across the ice. I looked down toward their feet, and was shocked. Was the ice cracking?
“Look! The ice!” I shouted, pointing to the ice.
Freya padded close to the ice and examined it. Her green eyes bulged.
“Get off the ice!” she screamed.
Her scream caused everyone to begin to scramble along the ice. While most listened to her, the racers and some older kids ignored her. A few kids, however, bumped into each other and fell. There was a loud snap, and suddenly five kids were engulfed in icy water as the ice tipped and cracked in half. The racers managed to get off the ice as cracks traveled through the ice. Then, suddenly, the ice that had tipped slammed back into place.
The kids were trapped! I ran over to a sharp rock nearby and grabbed it. Then, I scrambled onto the ice, slipped, and fell into my stomach. I slid over to a crack and began to chip at it frantically.
“FRATLEY! GET BACK HERE!” I heard Rose scream, but I ignored her.

Soon, Freya was beside me, following my example. Then, suddenly, we heard something snap. Freya immediately slid away, but I was too late. The ice reared upward and dumped me into the icy water as the weight became too much. I screamed with terror, and icy water filled my mouth. Panicking, I began to sink in the icy water.

Strange screams came to my ears within the waters. I tried to swim toward the surface, and my head met solid ice. I began to claw at it. My finger caught a hole, and I began to pound at the hole. Soon, there was a breakage, and I tried to pull myself through. The ice snapped into many tiny pieces as I slammed my head through. I was pulled out of the water as I gasped and choked. Soon, four other children, who I heard the ice cracking and managed to swim over to the hole I had made, were hauled up. One child, however, was missing.

I felt warm arms around me, and someone dropped a huge blanket on me. I pushed my heard through the blanket and found myself staring at Rose.

“Fratley, why didn’t you listen?” Rose asked me, her voice plagued with worry.

“The — kids — were — in — trouble,” I said through chattering teeth.

“’Ere’s the last!” I heard Aireff cry, and I twisted my head to see him helping the last shivering, terrified

kid out of icy water.
“What happened?” Rose asked Aireff.
“Ice ’ad been too weak ta support all the activity,” Aireff said. ‘Then when all the kids panicked from the shout, it just snapped.’
“Hey! Is everyone okay?” Ruben asked, panting. “God, that ice scared me! I thought I was going to go under!”
“I think everyone’s fine,” Freya said, watching the scene.
“Cold, but fine,” I muttered, shivering.
“Let’s head home, then. I don’t want you to catch pneumonia,” Rose said, and I could tell she was nervous.
Rose rose to her feet, helping me along. Angela staggered over and was hoisted on Aireff’s shoulders. He did one last check of the area before nodding.
“Everyone’s okay. The last child almost drowned but someone was able ta ’elp out,” Aireff told Rose.
Rose nodded as she began to head in the direction of home. Pushing my wet shoulder-length hair out of my face, I followed. Ruben and Aireff followed last. I took one last look behind me, and saw Freya staring at me. I read her look, and I suddenly understood.
I was going to be in forever debt to Freya, the

curious girl. ———— That’s Chapter Two! Hope you like it =) Oh, and for those who couldn’t figure out the last sentence: Freya was the one who pulled Fratley out of the water.

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Chapter Three

Chapter Three
Birth of a Warrior, Death of a Cherished One

I was the only one in the entire house who woke up early four years later. I bounced out of bed, excited. Birthday! It was my eleventh birthday, and I still remembered the promise Aireff had made two years before. I first made sure Angela was doing okay, then bounded straight out of the bedroom and into the kitchen.

Aireff wasn't awake. No matter, he would be soon. I entered my parent's bedroom, only to find it empty. Rose was already awake? Then where were she and Aireff? Baffled, I decided to try downstairs. I headed downstairs, and soon saw Aireff and Rose on the couch, talking.

"Hey!" I shouted. "Remember?"

I heard Aireff sigh, and he looked up.

"Remembe' what?" he asked.

"You know!" I cried. 'I've been practicing for years, but now you have to!'

"Why are ya so excited? Ruben isn't," Aireff pointed out.

"You said I had the potential, remember? Come on!"

I begged.
“Aireff,” Rose said when Aireff moved to speak. “We ’ave no choice. Maybe Ruben won’t want to, but Fratley deserves it if ’e wants it, right?”
Aireff nodded slightly, and I heard him sigh once more. He then rose and looked at me.
“All right, all right,” he said. “Go upstairs, we’ll join ya soon.”
I nodded eagerly and bounded up the stairs. I rushed into the kitchen and sat the table, fidgeting eagerly. I was truly excited. I had seen Aireff fight plenty of times, and I had seen Rose fight once in a while too. I admired the warriors of the Burmecia, and dreamed of joining them.
Now, finally, I would be one step closer. I had been practicing long enough with a flimsy, dull wooden lance that didn’t meet my liking. It had been for Ruben, but he didn’t like it and gave it to me. Within a year or so I had mastered it. Now, I was ready for a real lance.
It seemed like hours before Aireff and Rose at last appeared in the kitchen. Aireff disappeared into the bedroom while Rose sat down.
“Are you sure you want to do this?” she asked.
“Of course!” I replied. ‘I’ve practiced for years, ’ow could I not want this?’
“Your father is worried. His ancestors were not

warriors. They were craftsmen," Rose told me.
"'E doesn't 'ave to worry! I'll be fine! I don't want ta be a craftsmen! Let Ruben be the craftsmen," I wailed.
Rose smiled slightly. "Fratley, I know. I want you to do this. But. I want you to be careful, okay? Being a warrior is dangerous."
"I know that. Aww, mamá, quit being such a pest! I'll be fine, I've been practicin' forever!"
"Prove that ya are payin' attention," Aireff said, suddenly tossing a Javelin in my direction.
I dodged the Javelin's pointy tip and grabbed the Javelin as it soared above my head. It was heavier than I had expected. I lowered the Javelin to my level and stared at it. The long handle was made of a thick wood, unlike my wooden spear, which was hollow. The pointy tip was made of iron, and two smaller iron tips were beside the larger one. I marveled at the weapon. It looked dangerous.
Even better, it was mine.
"There's ye weapon, Fratley," Aireff said, pouring himself a cup of tea. 'Maybe later I'll take ya down ta the lake ta practice, if ye mothe' allows it.'
"I wouldn't mind," Rose immediately said. "Ruben can watch Angela, and I want Fratley to get some practice."
I was so excited I couldn't speak. Was I really going

to go to the lake and practice? I stared at the Javelin, wondering what it was like to use it in a fight. I remembered the times when my father would be fighting, and how exciting fighting looked. I could barely wait.

“Fratley, ’ow ’bout you ’ave some tea?” Aireff asked.

I shook my head, wanting nothing. All I wanted to do was go to the lake and try out the Javelin. I rose to my feet and sat down at the table, putting the Javelin carefully on the table. Rose took some tea and sat down as well. Aireff was leaning against the counter, sipping his tea. Soon, Ruben entered.

“Hello,” he said. ‘What’s going on?’

“Fratley has a weapon,” Aireff said.

“Yeah, so ya better not annoy me!” I said teasingly.

Ruben laughed. “You’re too nice to poke me with that thin.”

“Is Angela all right?” Rose asked.

“She’s breathing,” Ruben said simply.

Rose immediately rose from the table and rushed into the bedroom. Angela had been getting worse and worse as the years passed. Her legs were no longer usable as painless paralysis came in. The glucose clogged her throat ever more often. Her hands were not shaking anymore. They were instead losing any feeling. She could still play cards,

however, I didn't know how much longer she could. Suddenly worry for my sister flooded my mind. That's it? She was only breathing? I rose and jogged into the room to find my mother almost in tears.
"Angela?" she was whispering. "Angela? Angela?"
I rushed over and fell to Angela's side. I watched as her eyes slowly opened. Those beautiful violet eyes were suddenly dull and almost lifeless.
"Mamá." she whispered.
"Angela," Rose choked out. 'Angela, get up. Get up.'
"Angela?" I asked.
"Mamá, Fratley," Angela muttered, taking a deep breath. 'It's okay. This is good.'
"Angela," Rose choked out. "Fratley, get Junes. Get Junes."
Immediately I rose and ran out of the room.
"What's wrong, Fratley?" Aireff asked.
"Angela," I managed to say as I nearly flew down the stairs.
I opened the door and was greeted by summer humidity. I closed the door quickly and began to jog down the wet streets. The rain was fairly heavy, as it always was in the middle of July. I raced down the street and accidentally bumped into a woman.
"Oh, I'm sorry!" I immediately said.
"It's all right. What's the hurry?" the woman asked.

“My sister is in trouble. I need Junes!” I told her.
The woman frowned. “In trouble?”
“She’s dying!” I blurted out.
I rushed by the woman before she could reply. My feet pounded and scraped against the wet street as I dodged people, heading straight for Junes’ home. I had to go there many times before for Angela. I memorized the way to his house. I darted in and out between early-morning crowds until I at last came to Junes’ house. I pounded my fist on the door. It seemed like hours before Junes finally appeared.
“Fratley?” he asked.
“Angela is dying!” I wailed.
Immediately Junes turned around and rushed back into the house. I waited at the door anxiously. Soon, I saw Junes come with his large sack. I immediately turned around and ran toward home, Junes following me. I was running so quickly I slammed into the door of my house and fell to the ground. Junes helped me to my feet, opened the door, and hurried up the stairs. I followed him, closing the door before darting up the stairs. No one was in the kitchen, so I quickly darted into the children’s bedroom.
Junes was kneeling beside Angela, looking her over. Tears were streaming from Rose’s eyes as Aireff hugged her for comfort. Ruben looked extremely worried. I watched as Junes looked her over. He

frowned.
“I don’t know,” he said. “I think her heart is failing. There’s nothing I can do.”
It took a few seconds for his words to sink in, and when they did, it felt like the sky had fallen and crushed me. I rushed over to Angela, Ruben following. Rose at this point seemed to be going insane, and she didn’t go anywhere. Aireff was trying desperately to comfort her while making an attempt to keep himself calm.
“Angela!” I cried. ‘Not now! Not now!’
“Fratley, don’t worry. This — is good. No more problems, and no — more burdens. I will be happy, and all of you — can live your lives with — no problems,” Angela said quietly.
“You’re not a burden! This is not good. Angela, don’t you understand?” I sobbed.
“Fratley, imagine sleeping a — peaceful night. Imagine — waking up and not — having to do anything special. Imagine — a life with fewer burdens. Fratley — I want to leave,” Angela whispered.
“Don’t say that!” I cried.
Ruben bowed his head. “I guess if it’s what you want, we can’t change your mind.”
Angela only smiled. “Ruben — you’re a great — fellow. Become — that blacksmith — all right?”

Ruben nodded feebly. He then suddenly ran out of the room. I took a shaky breath.
“Angela — Angela, you’ll always be the Queen of Cards,” I muttered.
Angela smiled. “Maybe — someday — we — can — play — again.”
At this point the tears in my eyes were making it extremely difficult to see. I could still see, however, Angela’s eyes close and her chest make one last attempt at a full breath. But then she sighed a soft sigh. Nothing followed this sigh. Angela lay still.
Rose screamed.

About a half-hour later the house was still chaotic. Rose and Aireff were crying in each other’s arms. Ruben had simply headed downstairs. I was watching the priest.
I was angry. He said he was helping her to the next world. But she was already in the next world! He had come too late to help her anywhere! Wherever she was, she was stuck there, and a priest wasn’t going to help in the least.
“You’re useless!” I screamed at the priest suddenly.
I ran out of the room and into the kitchen. Nothing seemed the same. I grabbed my new Javelin and raced down the stairs and out of the house. The July humidity greeted me. Outside, everyone seemed too

happy. Even the rain seemed too happy. I ran away from all these people and toward the back of the house. Behind the house was a once-gorgeous tree. Now it was dead. I ran toward the tree and began hacking away at its black, dead trunk. I didn't notice, but each attack hit exactly where I wanted it to hit. The Javelin hit its target perfectly and without a flaw each time. I wasn't admiring my skills, however. I was venting out anger at the priest for coming late, at Junes for doing nothing, and at death, for taking Angela.

I heard something behind me, and I turned around. To my surprise and anger, there was a girl around my age hanging about on the roof. She was familiar, but in my state I could not remember a thing about her. She stared with green eyes that held pity.

I picked up a rock.

"GET OUT OF HERE!" I roared, throwing the rock in the girl's direction.

I didn't see or hear the girl move, but before I knew it she was on a different roof, out of harm's way. She was staring at me.

"You never had a death in your family, did you? You wouldn't understand!" I screamed.

Suddenly I was on the ground, the girl standing over me. Her once placid green eyes were on fire.

"Don't dare assume something unless you know it is

true," she hissed.
Then, suddenly, her voice brought me to reality. I recognized her silver hair and green eyes. This was the girl who had saved my life a few years before.
"Freya," I muttered. "I'm sorry."
I expected her to cream me. She instead rose to her feet and allowed me to rise as well.
"I'm sorry about your sister," Freya said quietly. 'But don't blame it on me or the tree. We didn't do anything.'
"How did you know it's my sister? Have you been stalking me?" I asked angrily.
"You bumped into my mother, and she kind of told the rest of us. Go home," Freya said.
She walked away, and I found I couldn't chase her. I instead headed home.
"Fratley, where were you?" Rose asked.
Her voice was soft, her eyes puffy and red. I could see that her cheeks were wet. I ran into my mother's arms.
"Mamá," I muttered softly. "Mamá, I want to become a Dragon Warrior. I want to protect people like Angela."
Rose was silent for a while. I could feel her shaking.
"Whatever you want, Fratley, whatever you want," Rose choked out along with tears.

Rose began to cry, and this triggered my own tears. We both sobbed over Angela.

———— That's Chapter Three! I really have no clue what I was aiming for in this chapter. I stuck with explaining what happened to Angela, and why Fratley chooses to be a Dragon Warrior instead of just an average soldier. Bit of a bad chapter, I know, but I had a major case of Writer's Block, which may explain the, eh, crappiness. Next chapter should be better, once I actually start to write it!

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Chapter Four

Chapter Four
Wild One

One year later, I knew exactly what I would be doing. I woke up just as the sun was rising on other parts of the Continent. I yawned and slid out of the bed and straight onto the floor. I rose to my feet, looking around. Outside, the spring rain was peaceful. I left the room and entered the kitchen.

I was a bundle of nerves. I started a pot of water boiling over the fire to make tea. I wasn't fond of the taste, but it stifled my nerves. I tried to sit at the table and be still, but soon I was pacing around. Today was the day the Dragon Warrior contestants would be chosen. I was younger than all the contestants were. What if I screwed up?

You'll be fine, I tried to assure myself.

It took me a few seconds to realize the water was boiling, and had nearly boiled itself away. I quickly took it off the fire and poured what was left the water into the mug. Stirring the tea idly, I looked around the dark, quiet house. I was the only one awake. By the time someone woke up, I would already be gone.

I drank some of the tea, but it tasted funny to me. There was something wrong with it, or me. I forced myself to drink it all, then put the cup in the sink. I rose to my feet, took the Javelin from the wall, and headed down the stairs. I left the house and started down the quiet road. As usual, some Burmecians were already up. I headed toward the lake, where the Contestants were to be tested. I tossed my Javelin from hand to hand nervously.

"Hey."

I stopped walking and looked around to locate the voice. Soon, the speaker appeared. She stared at me with green eyes. I recognized her immediately.

"Hello," I said.

At this point the two of us tried to remember each other's names. We spent a lot of time together, but we could never remember the name of the other.

"Freya," I guessed.

"No fair, you remembered first," Freya muttered. 'Fratley?'

"Yep," I said proudly. "We'll remember eventually."

"When we're 50," Freya muttered.

I laughed. "At this rate it is going to take that long."

We began to walk down the street. I could sense Freya's nervousness, though why she was nervous I did not know. I didn't really care either, as I was too busy admiring how pretty she looked that morning.

“Everyone’s sleeping in late,” Freya said, though I wasn’t paying attention. “Usually more people are awake.”
A few seconds passed, and before I could react Freya had pinned me to a wall.
“Pay more attention or I’m going to kick your ass,” she muttered with a smile.
Freya always seemed to know when a guy was admiring her, and for some reason she preferred men listening to her to admiring her. I couldn’t figure it out.
“Sorry,” I muttered, now not only admiring Freya’s looks but also her quickness on foot. ‘So, quiet night — I mean morning, huh?’
Freya laughed. “You’re funny.” She began to walk away.
“Hey, wait, what’s so funny?” I asked, running after her.
Freya smiled. “You are!” She then began to run off.
“I don’t get what I did that is so funny!” I replied, chasing after her.
“You’ll figure it out! Think like a lady!” Freya said with a grin.
“Telling me to think like a lady is like telling my father to do the laundry!”
“I take it he doesn’t do it?”
“Never! He wouldn’t do it for a million Gil! And I

won’t think like a lady for that much money either!”
“Would you do it for a kiss?”
“What?!”
“You heard me.”
At this point Freya leapt onto a roof and began jumping from roof to roof. I followed her, but ended up falling on my face by the third jump. I rose quickly to my feet, but only ended up falling off the roof and into a rose garden.
“Yow!” I yelped. “Thorns!”
Freya was standing on the roof laughing hysterically. I leapt out of the rose garden, brushing away thorns. I glared at Freya.
“You are very hard to be friends with!” I snarled.
Freya smiled. “Oh, I know.”
Freya’s smile warmed my heart and I suddenly couldn’t be mad at her. Her smile broadened.
“But you have to love me!” she chirped, leaping down to my level.
“You’re right about that one,” I commented. ‘You could rob a store and your smile would make you get away with it.’
“I’ll have to try that,” Freya said thoughtfully.
“No, please don’t!” I said with a laugh.
“The stores don’t have anything good to rob anyway,” Freya said.
“Thank goodness,” I muttered. ‘You’d be robbing

every store in sight otherwise.'
"Oh, shut up!" Freya growled, cuffing me playfully.
"What are you, a wolf?" I asked teasingly. "Play-fighting?"
At this point Freya tackled me to the ground, a smile on her face.
"No, I'm a cat. And you're a mouse," she told me.
"Oh no, she's going to eat me!" I yelped with feigned fear.
"Nah, I don't think so. You wouldn't taste good. Maybe I'll just play with you and leave you to die."
I simply rolled my eyes. Eventually she would get off me, but it wouldn't do any good to try and throw her off. Freya was stronger than I was, though Freya said otherwise.
"Then the vultures can eat you," Freya finished, and I realized I hadn't been paying attention.
"So I'm going to have a very bad death?" I asked.
Freya smirked. "Oh, yes, and I'm going to cause it!"
"I'm really scared, Freya."
"You should be."
"Can you just get off me?"
"I have to hurt you first!"
"Then hurt me and get it over with."
Freya gave me a kiss on the cheek and leapt over me. I stared at her as she rose to her feet.
"That didn't hurt, you know," I said, though I was

surprised.
“I’ll have to try harder next time,” Freya said jokingly. “Well, are you going to just sit there staring at me like I’m a goddess? Let’s go!”
I rose to my feet, and we began to walk toward the lake. Freya’s nervousness seemed to have left while mine returned quickly. I took my Javelin, which I had strapped to my back, and began to fumble with it again.
“Something wrong?” Freya asked.
“Just nervous,” I commented.
“Think I’m going to hurt you?” Freya asked teasingly.
“No! I’m nervous about the choosing today,” I explained. ‘I don’t think I’ll make it.’
“Not make it? What for? You’re the strongest kid in this whole town and you don’t think you can make it?” Freya asked.
“I’m the youngest contestant. I just know I am,” I said nervously. “If I screw up —”
“Which is completely impossible —”
“I’m going to be the laughing stock of Burmecia.”
Freya laughed and put her arm around my shoulders. “I doubt that. You’re pretty quick and strong. How could you not make it?”
“I can’t catch you,” I said. ‘You always end up bringing me flat on my face. I think you have a

better chance of making it than me.'
"Are you kidding? I have a better chance of growing a second tail and learning to dance perfectly than beating even one contestant!" Freya wailed.
"Freya, I've seen you dance and you dance better than my mother," I commented. 'Also, you're so quick, if not exactly strong. They'll pick you immediately.'
"But I'm a girl," Freya muttered downheartedly.
"So what? You're stronger than most of the guys in this whole kingdom!" I declared. 'You have a better chance than me when both my parents are Dragon Warriors and forced me to know my ABC's when I was only eight!'
"So that's where you were," Freya muttered. She sighed. "I don't know how to read."
"You learn when you're elected to the Dragon School, and I know you'll make it!"
"I don't know."
"You'll be fine! You'll make it, and I'll cheer you on!"
"Frat, you're the one who's going to make it."
"Not a chance!"
"Have you noticed our complete lack of confidence in ourselves, yet our full confidence for each other?"
"We've always been like this, Freya," I said with a laugh.

My laugh seemed to ease the both of us, and Freya smiled. We were nearing the gate leading to the Royal Grounds. We stepped up the stairs, and soon fell into a race. Freya won, being naturally quicker. I was gasping by the end of it.
“Too much running!” I gasped.
I began to fall downward, and Freya caught me. We both knew that I had feigned the whole stunt. Laughing, Freya shoved me forward.
“Come on, slave, move faster!” she cried.
“Since when was I your slave?” I asked.
“Since five seconds ago,” Freya said with a grin.
“Oh, fine. Yes, master!” I saluted Freya and held open the door for her.
Freya smiled wickedly. “Good slave.” She gave me a light punch in the cheek as she stepped through. Though it left nothing more than a slight tingle, I made myself fall over just to give her satisfaction. I rose to my feet and entered through the doorway, closing the door behind me.
“Naughty slave, you took too long!” Freya snapped, grinning.
I shrugged. “That’s what happens when you punch the slave, master,” I said, and received a punch in the shoulder.
“That’s not how slaves talk, you dip!” Freya muttered.

“Sorry, I’m not used to slaves,” I whispered back with a shrug.
“Oh well, fun while it lasted,” Freya said. ‘Come on, down to the lake!’
“Yes, ma’am!” I saluted Freya once again.
“Don’t do that, it’s ridiculous,” Freya said with a laugh.
We resumed walking, this time in the direction of the lake. Its waters were very calm, though no doubt freezing. We could see someone near the lake. He had a target used commonly for arrows with him. He saw us coming and waved. I waved in return, but Freya seemed just about ready to run away and never come back. I took her gently by the arm.
“Come on!” I said.
Freya only nodded dumbly, and we rushed down to the guy.
“Hello,” the Burmecian said, looking up at me. He completely ignored Freya. ‘You are a contestant?’
“Yes,” I said.
He nodded and turned away. Freya let out a soft whine.
“So is she,” I said.
The Burmecian turned around and stared at Freya. He snorted, apparently thinking I was joking, and turned back around. Freya looked just about ready to run away, while I was ready to kill something.

“I’m serious, you know. She is here to try out!” I snapped.
The Burmecian once again turned around.
“What’s your name?” he asked.
“Fratley,” I replied.
The Burmecian nodded and wrote my name down on a piece of paper. He didn’t turn around, however, and now I was mad. Freya sat down on the ground, staring at the dirt sadly. I could see a few tears in her eyes.
“Can I see that paper?” I asked. “Sometimes people spell my name wrong.”
The Burmecian nodded gruffly. He handed me the paper, and a quill wet with ink. I didn’t care if my name was spelled wrong, however. I carefully wrote Freya’s name on the paper. I returned the paper.
’What is this? “The man asked, pointing to Freya’s name.
“Her,” I replied, pointing to Freya. ‘I figured that since you wouldn’t sign her up, I would.’
“Females aren’t —” the man began.
“Oh yes they are! My mother is Lady Rose of Burmecia,” I hissed.
“Oh — well — uh,” the man stuttered, staring at Freya. “G-Good luck.”
Freya looked up at me with surprise. She looked just about ready to hug me. I smiled in return.

“Can’t fight the facts,” I muttered.
Freya smiled slightly. She rose to her feet and walked away. I followed her. She walked behind a large group of hedges. I followed, and before I knew it Freya was hugging me so tightly I could barely breathe.
“Oh my God, thank you so much,” she muttered. “I knew something like that would happen. Thank you, thank you, thank you!”
I didn’t say anything, mainly because I couldn’t. Soon Freya released me and looked at me with a bright smile. I smiled in return.
“You’re welcome,” I said simply.
Freya gave me a quick kiss on the cheek and leapt over the hedges. I stared at her as she headed toward the lake.
That’s the second kiss she’s given me today, I thought. Either she likes to kiss her friends, or there’s more than a friendship here.
I shook the very nice thought away. Love? I was too young for love. Rose would kill me, even if she did fall in love with Aireff by 13. For her, it was okay. For me, no.
“Hello? Come down to Gaia, Fratley!” Freya chirped, dragging out the first a in Gaia.
She was sitting on top of the hedges, watching me with amusement. How many minutes she had been

watching me I do not know. I looked over at her with confusion, and she laughed.
“Don’t give me that look, Frat. What were you thinking about?” she asked.
I smiled. “Oh, nothing.”
“Uh-huh. Yeah, sure, try another one, Frat,” Freya said, rolling onto her back. ‘You look really funny upside-down.’
I laughed. “You’re ridiculous. What are you doing on a hedge?”
“It’s pretty comfortable,” Freya commented.
“Well, get off before the bugs bite you,” I said with a grin.
“BUGS!” Freya shrieked, leaping off the hedge. I laughed hysterically. ‘That’s not funny, Fratley!’
“What is it with women and bugs?” I asked while laughing.
“I’m not scared of bugs,” Freya retorted.
“Then explain why you leapt off the hedge screaming like a ninny.”
“I don’t want bugs crawling on me. Very uncomfortable.”
I grinned. “All right, if you’re not so scared up bugs, here!”
I suddenly threw a bug in Freya’s face. She screamed and backed away. The ladybug flew away, and I began laughing. Freya tackled me to the

ground.
“Don’t do that!” she screamed.
“I’m sorry,” I gasped between laughs. ‘Your reaction is just so funny.’
“Oh, you’re not sorry yet,” Freya said with a grin. “Now I get to tickle you!”
“CRAP!”
I hated being tickled, and Freya knew it. She hated bugs, and I knew it. So whenever we got mad at each other, we had a fight — bugs vs. tickling. Normally tickling would win since I would run out of bugs.
After a few minutes we emerged from behind the hedges, our faces red with crazy laughter. Freya was still trying to tickle me, but I would dodge and hold a ladybug near her. She would back away, but then she would approach, and the process would repeat. Finally we both calmed down, and I let the ladybug go. The other contestants that had shown up were staring at us. We sat down on the grass, waiting patiently for the contest to begin.
Well, we were waiting as patiently as possible. Freya never learned how to be patient, and she was constantly ruffling my shoulder-length hair, playing with the grass, or examining my hair as if it were some wonder of the world. I tried to stay calm, but Freya’s childish antics were pretty funny and

sometimes I couldn’t help but chuckle.
Then, suddenly, Freya came to attention. I also did. The man signing up the contestants had risen to his feet and cleared his throat. My own throat went dry. It was starting!
“Step up!” he shouted.
We all stood up.
“To where?” another candidate asked.
“Soon, to here. For now, take a look around you. You are surrounded by a country that prospers in a place of lovely scenery. Love it and may the Dragon bless you,” the man continued.
He sounds like a priest, I thought with amusement.
“Now, the lance,” the man said, holding up a lance. “This weapon will do you either good or wrong. It is the main weapon of a Dragon Warrior. Today we shall see whether you are right for it.”
The man tossed the lance to me, and I caught it with ease. It was indeed a Javelin and I was very used to its weight.
“How old are you?” the man asked.
“Twelve,” I replied.
“You’re that young and expect to be accepted? What an idiot!” a candidate sneered, his blue eyes flashing.
“Oh, you’re so great? Let’s see you in action,” I snapped, tossing the lance to the candidate.

The candidate had not expected me to give him the lance, but he didn’t back down. Carefully he aimed, rushed forward, and hit the target. He was a good inch away from the target. The man nodded, muttering to himself. He then took the lance and tossed it to the next candidate. This candidate just made it on the target. The lance was passed on and on, each candidate hitting the target, until it was passed to Freya.

Freya’s hands were shaking, and she was clearly sweating. She bit her lower lip nervously as she stared at the target.

“You’ll be fine,” I whispered softly.

Freya spun the lance around in her left hand. The spinning seemed to be in slow motion, and she nearly dropped it. A few of the other candidates had sneers on their faces. Freya swallowed nervously. “Come on, girly! Get out while you can!” a candidate sneered. I would probably kill the guy later. Freya almost dropped the spear. She suddenly rushed forward and drove the lance into the target. She was only a half-inch away from the bull’s-eye. All sneers turned to looks of shock. I whistled with triumph.

“You were made for this, Freya!” I shouted.

The lance clocked me in the head and I fell to the ground. I heard a bunch of guffaws, but I quickly

grabbed the lance and leapt to my feet. I glared at the man who had thrown the lance when I wasn't prepared, and he shrugged. He didn't care. I sighed, spun the lance around, and rushed forward. I drove the lance into the target.

A bag made of leather filled with water inside the target burst as the lance pierced it. The lance had hit the bull's-eye. Everyone stared while Freya began cheering. I was staring at the target with surprise. I had hit it? I had to have. The rain couldn't have made me so wet.

"Um — uh — you will receive the results in a few days," the man stuttered. "Have a good day."

All the candidates walked away, and Freya and I did as well. We walked straight behind the hedge and hugged each other.

"God, Frat, you did great!" Freya said, smiling. 'And you thought you wouldn't make it? Puh! You were better than those assholes!'

"You did fine, too," I said. "Bet you have a better chance of making it than me?"

"You kidding? I was shaking and you were fine and hit the bull's— eye! I don't think I'll make it," Freya said.

"You must be a nitwit to think that! Come on, Freya, you were quicker than anyone there and the closest to the bull's-eye," I said.

“You have a better chance!”
“We’re equal, okay? Equal!’” No way. “We released each other and looked around. No one cared to stick around and listen to us. We crawled over the hedges and began to head toward home. Both of us were much less nervous. Soon, we reached the intersection that split my street from Freya’s street. We stood there doing absolutely nothing.” Well, “Freya said, taking a deep breath.” I guess I’ll see you later. “I nodded dumbly, only half-paying attention. Freya headed off toward her house. I watched her leave. She was pretty, she was friendly, and she was hilarious.
What was I doing her watching her walk away?” Hey, Freya, wait! “I cried, rushing after her.
Freya turned around and stared at me.” Hmm? “” Ah — Do you think your mother would mind if — “” Oh, you want to come home with me? “Freya asked before I could say anything more. She smiled.” Oh, sure! My mother won’t care. “Either that or you don’t care if she cares, I thought with amusement.
We began to walk down the street. I had passed down this street only once before, and it had changed since then. I marveled at all the houses. Freya was quickly moving until she finally got to a simple, two-story house. It was made of stone and decorated with brilliantly watercolors. The door was

nearly invisible since it was stone just like the house. I could see only four windows, two on the main level, and two on the higher level. Freya bounded over to the door and opened it." MOM! "she screamed." Hey! I brought company! "I entered the house quietly." Freya, quit screaming like a banshee, "I heard a male voice say.

A teenaged Burmecian entered. He had green eyes just like Freya, and his hair was a chestnut color.

"Why do you always scream?" he asked. He then noticed me. 'Oh, who's this? MOM, FREYA HAS A BOYFRIEND!'

"Matt, be quiet!" Freya screamed.

"Do you all always scream?" I asked, my ears aching.

"We do to get points clear," Freya replied.

"Matt, hush. Freya, who did you bring?"

A woman entered the room. She had the same green eyes as Freya and long blonde hair. She looked a lot like Freya except for lines of stress on her face.

"Mom, this is Fratley," Freya said, shoving me forward. 'Frat! Say hello!'

I looked up at the woman nervously. "Hello."

Freya's mother smiled. "Hello. I'm Marie."

"Nice to meet —"

"Freya has a boyfriend! Freya has a boyfriend! Woo woo!" Matt screamed.

“Matthew!” Freya shrieked.
“Freya has a boyfriend! Freya has a boyfriend! Woo woo!” Matthew screamed, dancing around.
Freya’s face was turning red. My ears ached from the screaming. Marie was trying to restore peace but it wasn’t working well. Soon, another teenager entered.
“Matt, quit screaming,” she said, staring at Matthew with turquoise eyes. ‘Freya, do ya really have a boyfriend?’
“Well, um,” Freya stuttered.
“See? SEE? She does! Freya has a boyfriend! Woo woo!” Matthew shrieked.
“MATTHEW!” Freya screamed.
“Dear God,” I muttered.
“Matthew, hush!” Marie shouted. ‘Freya, stop screaming!’
“Mom! Matthew won’t shut up!” Freya screamed angrily.
“No one is shutting up at this rate,” the girl who entered said. She walked over to Freya and pinned her to the wall. “Shut up.”
I watched the scene suspiciously.
“Arana,” Freya snapped. ‘Get off of me!’
“You stop screaming first,” Arana said slowly. I saw her grip get tighter.
“Arana, get off!” Freya growled.

Arana's grip became tighter, and Freya winced.
"Arana," Freya muttered.
"Arana, get off her," Marie commanded.
Arana released Freya and looked over at Matthew. "Come on, Matt. Quit being a brat."
Matthew grinned and headed off with Arana. Freya was rubbing her shoulders. I walked over.
"You all right?" I asked.
"Yeah, I'm fine," Freya muttered.
Marie nodded. "All right, now. Sorry about the ruckus. Things should calm down now."
Marie left the room. Freya sighed.
"I'm sorry," she muttered. "My family's —"
"It's all right," I immediately said. "I don't mind."
I took this time to look around the room. We were in a small room with plain walls and a wooden floor. It expanded to the north in a massive yet still plain room with normal walls and a wooden floor. I could see a small wooden table with chairs in expanded area. There were a few wooden counters and cabinets. I could hear a fire crackling in the room, though I saw no fireplace. I assumed it was on the west wall and covered by the wall separating the smaller room from most of the bigger room.
"It's not much," Freya commented.
I chuckled. "It's more than I have."
Freya walked into the main part of the room, with

me trailing her. Indeed there was a fireplace on the west wall. Freya sat down at the table, but almost immediately got up.
“Do you want something?” she asked.
“No, no, that’s okay,” I said. I could tell something was wrong.
Freya sat down back at the table, staring at something only she could see. I almost sat down. I stared at her, wondering what was troubling her. Was it her crazy family? Me? Something else?
“Fratley,” Freya said softly. ‘I’m sorry.’
“What for?” I asked curiously.
“My stupid family,” Freya replied. ‘Matt screaming, Arana just about ready to kill me, and then my mother not even able to control us all. I’m sorry, it’s a nutcase. I’m so sorry.’
“No need to apologize,” I said gently. “My family is just as kooky, if not worse. I’m used to the nuttiness.”
“But the screaming and everything. You can’t be used to that, right?” Freya asked. ‘Well, no,’ I admitted. “But it doesn’t matter. You’re still friendly, right? You’re still fun. And I still like you. So who cares if your brother’s singing breaks windows?” Freya chuckled. “Finally, someone who agrees that he can’t sing.” She then sighed. “All right, Fratley, but if you don’t want to come here, I understand.” I

was about to speak, but Freya had already risen and headed down the hallway. I was about to follow her, but I sensed that she needed to be alone. “Freya!” I called. Freya turned around briefly. “I’ll see you soon!” I told her with a smile. Freya smiled in return, and my heart immediately melted. She headed up the stairs. I headed out of the house, closing the door behind me. I then allowed myself to chuckle. If Rose knew.

——— . She’d kill you. Hehe, I had lots of fun with this chapter, if you couldn’t tell by its length ^.^ So Freya and Fratley are good friends, and both great warriors at a young age. Do they both get accepted? Does their relationship blossom into something bigger? (gee, what do you think?) Find out!

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Chapter Five

Chapter Five
Death to Ebon!

A few days did indeed bring results, and a Dragon Warrior went around to the houses of the selected contestants telling them the good news. In the end, I was one of the chosen, and when I checked with Freya, she too had been chosen.

Within a few months summer had come, and so had training. I left the house early in the morning, as usual, and jogged down to Freya's house. I knocked on the door, and within a few seconds Matthew had answered.

"Hey! It's Freya's boyfriend!" he chirped.

I rolled my eyes. "Yeah, it's me. Freya awake?"

"Oh, yeah! Getting her fully awake is the trick," Matthew replied happily. "Come on in."

I entered the house quietly. I immediately headed into the living room to find Freya lying on the couch. I smiled, shaking my head, and walked over.

"Get up, lazy," I said teasingly.

"My brain's not working," Freya muttered.

"I'll jumpstart it," I said, grabbing a pillow and throwing it at her.

“Ah, Fratley!” Freya groaned, taking the pillow and throwing at me. ‘Five minutes.’
“We have to be there in five minutes.”
“Shit!” Freya leapt to her feet. ‘Why didn’t you tell me that?’
I shrugged. “I figured you knew. Are you ready?”
“Yeah, I can skip breakfast. Let’s go!”
“Eh, okay, whatever you say.”
We headed outside, Freya suddenly wide-awake.
“Oh, God, I’m nervous! I’ve heard bad things about Ebon!” Freya muttered.
“Ebon?” I asked.
“He’s the guy who trains the Dragon Warriors. I’ve heard bad things,” Freya told me. ‘He hates women.’
“Oh great,” I muttered. “Don’t worry, I’ll protect you.”
“You can’t protect yourself, let alone me!” Freya chirped and ran off.
“Get back here!” I screamed.
“I’m gonna beat cha! I’m gonna beat cha!” Freya shouted teasingly.
“Ya sound like a two-year-old, ya know that? At least m’ accent is completely natural when I use it!” I cried, returning to my natural accent.
Freya screeched to a stop, and I crashed into her. We both fell to the ground.
“Your accent is so cute!” Freya chirped.

“Eh? Freya, you say weird thing sometimes,” I commented.
“Oh, don’t return to normal now! The other accent is cute! I like it!” Freya said.
Well, I can tell you’ve gone insane, I thought.
“All right, all right, I’ll use this accent. But when we get ta the Academy I’m ’fraid I’m going ta return ta the normal one, okay?” I said.
“Aww! Oh well, good while it lasts,” Freya said. ‘Now can you get off of me?’
“Sorry!” I said with a laugh, getting off Freya. We both rose to our feet and began walking again. Freya was humming, looking around. I was thinking over what she had said earlier.
“Freya? Remembe’ what ya said earlier?” I asked.
“Yes, I said your accent was cute,” Freya said with a smile.
“Farthe’ back, Freya,” I said.
“I told you not to assume things unless you knew they were true,” Freya replied with a smile.
“Um, Freya? First off, I can’ see ‘ow ya can remembe’ that far. Second off, that’s too far. A little more ta the present, please,” I said, smirking. ‘It was a year ago, dope. Anyhow, I was talking about Ebon.’
“Yes, ‘im. I think m’ mothe’ mentioned stuff ’bout ’im once before.”

“What’d she say?”
“Ah — what did she say?”
“Oh Frat.”
We walked up the stairs leading to the gate leading to the Royal Grounds quietly. I was trying desperately to remember what my mother had said. Freya was waiting for me to remember. We stepped through the gate and headed in the direction of a large stone building near the Castle Gate.
“The Dragon Academy,” Freya muttered. ‘It’s huge.’
“It’s a giant complex. The Dragon Warriors use it as a school, a meeting center, a party place, and sometimes even an inn,” I explained. “So it ’as ta be pretty big.”
Freya nodded agreement. ’Did you remember what your mother said? “” Yes, actually, I did, “I said thoughtfully.”’E ’as a bad temper, ’ates women, and loves ta ’ave his way. “” Oh no, “Freya moaned, coming to a stop.” Aww, come on! I’m ’ere and if ya behave, ya’ll be fine! “I said with encouragement, walking over to Freya.
“If I behave? Fratley, since when do I behave? I never learned how to behave!” Freya complained sadly. ‘I’m hopeless now. I’m in for it.’
“Freya,” I began, but only found I had nothing to say.
Freya sighed and began to slowly walk toward the

Academy. I quickly followed. Soon, we were staring at the stone door that led inside. Freya took a shaky breath. She then carefully pushed open the massive door. I quickly followed.

We were in a wide hallway that broke into a massive room after seven feet. The floor was completely wooden with stone walls. Two doors on either side of the hallway were in front of us. We walked a bit forward.

“In here.”

The voice was like steel. Emerging from the west room was a man in his early forties. He appeared to be very strong and able to flip the strongest of men over his back. His eyes were a very deep blue and emotionless. He crossed his arms and stared at the two of us. A brief flash over anger came over his eyes as he stared at Freya, but it left quickly.

“Come in,” he growled.

Freya and I entered, with Freya clearly nervous. The room was small. One massive table was in the center of the room. Piled on it were books. There were no chairs anywhere in the room except for a stool near the far wall opposite the door. The table was very low, making it clear that you sat on the floor. I immediately sat down at the table, but Freya only stood there, watching Ebon nervously.

“Sit down,” the man snapped harshly at Freya.

Freya let out a soft whine and sat down. She stared at all the books, not daring to look at the man.
“Are you Ebon, sir?” I asked.
The man nodded gruffly. “Where are the others? Did you see them?”
“No,” I answered.
“How about you?” Ebon spat at Freya.
Freya shook her head nervously, looking up at Ebon briefly. Angry blue eyes met her nervous green eyes and she turned away nervously. I looked up at Ebon, but met no angry eyes. I turned away so he wouldn’t see my angry look.
Within a few minutes the others who had been chosen entered. There were only three of them. They all sat far away from Freya and I and closer to Ebon. Ebon nodded slightly.
“Welcome,” he said gruffly.
No one answered.
“You have been chosen to be Dragon Warriors, the most powerful and respected warriors in Burmecia,” Ebon began, sitting on the stool and staring at us all. “Physical strength is only one of the things you will need during this time. You need to have mental sharpness, self-control, respect, endurance, and a serious manner. You may find yourself being completely changed throughout the years that you will be here. But your learning will not end here.

Hopefully you will continue to learn." Discipline will be harsh. You are expected to come on time and ready to work. Respect is an utmost priority. One breaking of a rule can result in harsh discipline. It may even result in a flogging. "Ebon said the last sentence staring at Freya. Freya looked up at him briefly, then whined softly and turned away. I stared at Ebon, not trusting him in the least. He hated women, all right. It was obvious." We are going to alternate week by week from mental strength to physical strength. This week will be mental. You are going to learn how to read. I take it none of you can read? "Ebon asked." I can, "I said before Ebon could say anything.

Ebon turned his dark blue eyes on me. I stared in return. He walked over to a piece of parchment and handed it to me." Then read that, "he said simply."'If you can read this then I hereby declare that you have the ability to read perfectly', "I read flawlessly, causing everyone to stare.

Ebon was clearly impressed. He snatched the paper and tossed it aside." Right then. As I was saying, you will learn to read. Books offer the best of mental knowledge. The more you read, the more you learn, and the more you will gain. Within a week you will know how to read. If you need one more week, then fine. But no other weeks will be given for the dumb,

“Ebon said, the last sentence being said when his eyes were on Freya.” I’m not dumb, “Freya growled. Ebon only glared at her. Freya glared at him in return.
“You are expected to come here an hour after dawn,” Ebon continued, still looking at Freya. ‘Don’t, and you’ll be severely punished.’
“I came here on time today,” Freya whispered.
“Next week will be physical strength. The lake offers the best of physical exercise. All next week come to the lake a half-hour after dawn and be awake. I will shove you in the lake if I have to.” Ebon was staring at Freya still. “Come late and you’ll be punished.”
Silence followed. Freya was nearly shaking with anger at being insulted. I was also pretty angry, but I said nothing. Ebon and Freya were having a staring contest at that moment. Angry blue eyes met angry green. The three boys nearby snickered. I wanted to kill someone.
“If you do not behave, you will be kicked out,” Ebon growled at Freya.
“What the hell? I’m behaving perfectly fine! I’ve been sitting here calmly listening to everything you said! I haven’t done a God-damn thing!” Freya snapped.
“Freya,” I muttered softly. ‘Calm down.’

“Lower your eyes when speaking to a person higher than you,” Ebon barked.
“How come Fratley didn’t have to?” Freya asked, rising angrily to her feet. “How come it’s just me? How come I’m clearly going to get a flogging? How come I’m the one who’s ‘stupid’? How come you’re spitting insults at me?”
Smack.
It happened so quickly that it took me a few seconds to realize it. Soon, Ebon was standing over Freya, who was on the floor and rubbing her cheek. Immediately I was angry. Ebon had smacked her.
“Keep your mouth shut,” Ebon growled. “Respect is a key. Now learn it.”
Ebon turned around and headed back to the stool. Freya rose in a sitting position, glaring at Ebon. She then rose to her feet.
“Freya!” I whispered.
“I have no interest in being treated like shit,” Freya muttered. She then walked over to Ebon.
“Oh no,” I muttered, but it was blocked out by the snickering of two of the three guys. For some reason they found the entire thing hilarious.
“Look,” Freya said. ‘You said respect is a key. Well, why don’t you give me respect? Maybe you’ll get some in return.’
“Women don’t deserve respect. They’re nothing but

a bunch of assholes," Ebon replied.
Everyone stared with shock. Freya's eyes flashed as her face turned red.
"WHAT THE HELL!? What about your mother? She took care of you and loved you! What about Lady Rose of Burmecia? She protected this country with her life and still does! What about all the mothers out there who take care of their children with their own life and sacrifice their love to allow their children to go off and pursue this dangerous goal so you can train them? Are they all assholes too? Huh? ARE THEY?!" Freya screamed. "You know, you're just a bunch of shit!"
Ebon slowly turned around. He glared at Freya briefly. He then smacked her so hard she slammed against the wall. I gritted my teeth angrily. It took one more hard smack, however, before I leapt to my feet.
"Leave her alone," I snarled. "Not her fault she's a woman who's willing to stand up to you."
Ebon slowly looked at me.
"Be quiet, or I'll kick you out," he warned. His voice held far more respect for me than it had for Freya, however.
"But it's not right," I growled.
"Quiet," Ebon growled. He turned to where Freya had been, but she had fled. She was now behind me,

and I could feel her shaking.
“Now that the distraction is over, we may begin,” Ebon said. “Listen closely to what I say, as I will only say it once. Fratley, you may help them if you want.” Ebon motioned in the direction of the boys.
The boys sneered at me, and I immediately didn’t want to even go near them. I instead looked over at Freya. Her right cheek was beginning to swell, and she was watching Ebon with angry nervousness. I preferred her to sneering boys.
Ebon began his long, dull lecture. Freya clearly listened to every word. Two of the boys, however, did not. They began talking and snickering. They pointed to Freya, to me and then to Freya again while snickering. Ebon ignored them. The only ones listening, apparently, were one boy and Freya. I carefully began to rub Freya’s shoulders. She was obviously nervous and upset. I didn’t blame her.

Three hours later, the lecture was over.
“Someone repeat what I said,” Ebon commanded.
Freya and the one boy both rose their hands. Ebon immediately picked the one boy. He repeated everything perfectly, except for a word or two. His friends pat him on the back and congratulated him.
“Good job. It’s nice to see some of us listen,” Ebon said, turning his eyes on Freya.

Freya looked away. Her fighting spirit was gone. I glared at Ebon. Hadn't he noticed that Freya had listened to every word and probably could repeat each word perfectly? Then again, he probably knew. He just didn't care.

"All right, then. Take a book, and read it tonight. Yes, I know you just learned the prospects of letters. Apply it. Figure out what it may just say," Ebon said. "Dismissed."

Freya got up quickly, grabbed a book, and ran out. I also grabbed a book and jogged out of the room. I then looked around, wondering which way she went. I heard sobbing, and it was coming from further down the hall. I carefully walked into the large main room. It had a completely wooden floor, and two small half-rooms near the end. Spiraling stairs on each side of the room led upstairs. I headed into one of the half-rooms to find Freya on the couch in it, sobbing.

The room was small. There was a thin carpet on the floor. One couch was set up. There was a fireplace and two chairs. It seemed peaceful.

"Freya," I began, but couldn't find words.

"Fratley, what's my mother going to say?" Freya choked out. "She doesn't even know I'm doing this! I didn't tell her because — because —"

Freya rose to a sitting position, sobbing. She stared

at the floor. I sat down beside her.
“Freya,” I muttered.
“She — she said it was too dangerous,” Freya choked. ‘She — She didn’t want any — of us to become warriors. She never s-said why. When she — sees this,’ Freya choked, lightly touching her swollen cheek. “She’s going — to know something’s up! God, w-what if she blames you? You didn’t do anything!”
I was only half-aware that I was pulling Freya closer to me in a gentle, reassuring embrace.
“Freya, I don’t know,” I muttered.
“Neither do I!” Freya sobbed. “I — can’t g-go home now. But where w— will I go? I c-can’t stay here! E-Ebon will tear me limb from limb. I don’t understand. I-I can’t stand this. I-I can’t even pursue my own goals!”
Freya couldn’t even talk at this point. She instead placed her head against my shoulder and sobbed.

“Are you sure your mother won’t mind? And your father?”
“Positive Freya.”
We were walking through the woods outside the Academy. Not wanting to deal with Ebon and his questions, we had climbed through the window in the room and headed out that way. Now we were

heading in the direction of my home by taking the very long way.
Freya's eyes were red from crying. She was walking as close as she possibly could to me without the two of us actually touching. I was trying to figure out where I was going. I was heading in the direction of my house, but at the same time I knew we would pass Freya's house.
"I wish Ebon would just drop dead," Freya muttered.
"No, that wouldn't be a good enough death for 'im," I said. 'Most likely ya want 'im to drown with sharks eating 'im alive.'
"Eww! Frat!" Freya cried.
"I'm serious! That guy doesn' 'ave the right ta treat ya like ya are just a bunch of mindless shit!" I replied.
"Wow, you actually swore," Freya commented.
"Must be ya," I said, winking.
"Oh dear, I'm a bad influence," Freya said downheartedly.
I laughed. "Yeah right. One swear, great, now I'm going ta be runnin' around robbin' stores and burnin' down houses! Relax, Freya, relax."
"How can you expect me to relax now?" Freya asked.
"Well, I can'," I admitted. "But I can 'ope ya will."

Freya sighed and opened up the book she had grabbed. A giant picture of dragon stared at her.
“Um, did I grab a picture book?” she asked.
I laughed and flipped a page. We were staring at two pages that had to contain at least 1000 words each. Freya examined the letters curiously.
“Um — eh,” she muttered, looking at the first word. “T. H. E. Um. Th.”
Freya’s tongue skipped over the word. By then I had read the whole paragraph but I waited patiently.
“The?” she guessed. I nodded. ‘Well, that’s one down, 1999 to go.’
I laughed. “You’ll make it.”
“Hmm.” Freya stared at the next word. ‘D. R. A. G. O. N. Crap, a big one! Let’s see. Duh — rrr — ah — guh — on? Hmm, funny word. Oh, wait! Dragon! Duh!’
I nodded. “Yep.”
“This isn’t that hard,” Freya said. She looked up briefly just in time to dodge a tree. ‘Stupid tree. Anyway, I. S. Um — God, this one should be easy! — Eye. See? No, no such word. Eh. Zzzz? Is? Oh, why didn’t I get that?’
“Ya are doin’ pretty good for a beginner,” I reassured her. I looked out toward the road. “’Ey! I think we got to the Royal Gate!”
“Oh, so that word starts with ‘pow’. That’s good,

Frat, now we're closer to your home," Freya said.
We headed through the Gate and toward my street. Freya had, at this point, finally stumbled over the word "powerful". At that point the sentence ended and she closed the book.
"'The dragon is powerful'? No duh! Gee, I don't think I'd be able to figure that one out!" Freya said with sarcasm.
I only laughed. She seemed to be relaxing. We headed down my street, and soon my simple house came into few. I opened the door, leaving it open so Freya could get in.
"'Ey, mamá? I brought a friend home!" I shouted, coming up the stairs.
"Who?" Rose asked.
"Ya will see," I replied.
Freya slowly came up the stairs and looked around.
"You're right, your house is smaller than mine," she commented. "Still cute, though."

"Ya think everythin' is cute today!" I said teasingly.
"Hello," Rose said to Freya.
"Hello!" Freya chirped. "I'm Freya. I take it you're Fratley's mother?"
Rose nodded.
"It's a pleasure to meet you!" Freya chirped.

Rose nodded again, a small smile on her face. She turned to me. “Your father left to do some errands. ’E should be back soon.”
“Okay,” I said.
“HEY FRATLEY!” Ruben shouted, entering the room. “Come look at what I made! It’s really neat! You can bring your girlfriend too!”

“Girlfriend?” Freya asked.
“Um — eh, please, don’t ask,” I stuttered, following Ruben quickly. Freya followed.
Ruben headed downstairs into the basement, Freya and I following. Soon what he had made came into view.
“Wow,” I said with amazement. “Ta think that was once jus’ a block o’ stone!”
Ruben had been trying to sculpt a dragon out of stone for weeks, and he had finally succeeded. It looked as if an expert had done it and not a twelve-year-old kid. Freya clearly thought the same thing.
“Cool, Ruben. You’re going to be great when you become a sculptor,” I said.
Ruben nodded proudly. “Thanks! Oh, and your girlfriend’s really pretty!”

Freya blushed while I smacked myself in the forehead. Freya and I headed upstairs.
“He has a goal to flirt with every blue-eyed, blonde-

haired, pretty— faced girl in the entire kingdom," I muttered. 'And so far, he's succeeded.'
Freya giggled. "I'm glad I'm not blue-eyed, blonde-haired, or pretty— faced."
"You are pretty-faced," I pointed out.
By now we were in the bedroom. I was staring at Freya. She was staring in return. I don't know what we were hoping to find.
Girlfriend? Doesn't anyone get that we're just friends? I asked. Or are we?
"Hey, Freya?" I asked.
"Hmm?" Freya replied.
"We are just friend, right?" I asked.
Freya didn't answer. She only smiled.

——— Hello my loyal reviewers. Hope you still like the story. So we've met Ebon, Fratley's blind when it comes to love, Freya had major problems, and Dragon Academy is not going to be a walk in the park! How will our heroes survive? I don't know. Let me think! =D Anyway, stay tuned!

Thank you for reviewing! And thank you to those people who read and don't review. I know you're out there. *grins*

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copyright to SquareEnix.

Chapter Six

Chapter Six
Swimming & Home Fears

Dawn a week later. Well, actually, it wasn't dawn. I woke up a half— hour before dawn to give myself an hour to get ready to go the lake — and to get Freya up as well. I slid out of bed and onto the floor, as usual. Some people use their mothers to wake up, or the trumpets and bells of town. I use floors.
I headed into the kitchen quietly. Despite the darkness I knew what I was doing due to excellent eyesight. I lit a candle to help my eyes, then began to prepare water for tea. I then sat down at the table.
To my surprise, I heard someone knock on the door. I got up and headed down the stairs. I opened the door and found myself staring at a very worried-looking Freya.
"Fratley!" she said quietly. 'I am so sorry. Did I wake you?'
I shook my head. "What is it?"
"Can I come in?"
"Sure. Just be quiet, everyone's sleeping."
Freya quietly stepped up the stairs while I closed the door. Something was definitely wrong. Freya never

invited herself to anyone's house, and she was normally sleeping at this time anyway. I headed up the stairs.
"I'm so sorry," Freya said quietly. 'I'm having family problems and you're the first person I thought to run to.'
"It's all right," I said gently. "Want some tea?"
Freya nodded. "Sure. Thank you."
I took out two mugs from the cabinet while Freya sat down at the table nervously. The water was not yet boiling, so I set the mugs down, giving one to Freya. I also gave her a packet of tea.
"Thank you," Freya muttered. She was staring at her hands.
I was staring at her face. Her right cheek was bruised and swollen, while her left cheek was just recovering from a smack. The area around her left eye was also swollen and slightly black, though that had been a misaim on Ebon's part. Or so we hoped.
But something about her was still pretty.
"Something wrong, Fratley?" Freya asked.
"Oh, no! Sorry," I muttered, embarrassed. One of my major flaws was staring.
"It's all right," Freya muttered.
"Freya, you can speak. I'll listen," I said, patting her on the shoulder gently as I passed by to get to the boiling water.

Freya took a deep breath. “My mother is noticing the increasing bruises and swelling — how could she not? Now she’s getting suspicious.”
I nodded as I took Freya’s mug and filled it with water. She inserted the tea packet and began to idly stir it with a spoon she had received with the mug.
“She thinks it’s you,” Freya continued.
“Me?” I asked, accidentally spilling some water onto the floor. ‘I wouldn’t hurt you for a billion Gil!’
“I know, Frat, but she doesn’t. This world is a strange place, and my mother is its victim. She’s been through a lot, so she worries a lot too. So she’s going to — to —”
“To what?” I asked as I stirred my own tea.
Freya swallowed hoarsely. “To isolate me. She say she’s going to force me to stay home if it doesn’t stop.”
“Well, Ebon can’t get to you. But then I can’t see you,” I thought out loud.
“Frat — Oh God, Frat, it gets worse. She says she’s going to — to let me go out again, but forbid me from seeing you,” Freya whispered nervously.
I managed to keep my jaw from dropping straight to the floor.
“Freya,” I muttered. “Freya, that means you’ll be absent and late. Ebon’s going to —”
“I know,” Freya whispered. ‘Then what will I do?

She'll — she'll think I sneaked off with you or something and you hurt me!'
"Freya, why would you bother?" I asked, sipping my hot tea.
"Because I'm a wild, naughty girl! Everyone knows that! You know that, Fratley!"
"But if I was hurting you why would you still bother to hang around me?"
"Frat — Frat, there are people in this world who think they can't live without a person that they love, even if love hurts. It's a mad world out there, and Burmecians are being sucked in. Ebon's a good example."
"Amen to that."
"Frat, what am I going to do? Today we're going to be swimming and I just know Ebon's going to smack me for something. Something's going to be wrong, and I don't want to be swimming naked with Ebon around."
"Freya, Burmecians swim naked all the time. So does the rest of the world."
"I know that, Frat, but something is going to be wrong with my looks or something."
"Freya, I'm sorry to say it, but the only look Ebon wants you to the have is the Black and Blue one."
Freya sighed sadly. "True." She finally began to drink her tea, which she had been stirring while

talking.
“Freya, I wouldn’t worry about Ebon. I highly doubt he’s going to get wet. He’ll probably just tell us to do laps and exercise or something without bothering to go in himself,” I said gently.
“Yeah, that’s like Ebon,” Freya said with agreement.
Silence followed as we finished up our tea. I took the mugs and placed them in the sink.
“I guess we should get going,” I said.
Freya nodded and rose to her feet. We headed down the stairs and outside. Light was just descending on the city, with the rain coming down unusually hard. A storm was probably on its way. I closed the door of the house, and Freya and I headed in the direction of the lake. Freya didn’t say much, but that didn’t surprise me.
Soon we reached the lake since we weren’t speaking much. Ebon nodded at me, but didn’t even bother to acknowledge Freya. I sat down, but Freya kept standing. Ebon glared at her, and she quickly sat. She was looking around nervously. Ebon seemed to be counting how many blankets he had brought. He had seven, and I watched him toss three aside. That left four. Typical Ebon behavior. I noted the location of the other three blankets so I could grab one later.
It was another fifteen minutes before the other three contestants showed up. They sat down a few feet

away from Freya and I. Ebon checked to make sure we were all here.

“This week is going to be devoted to physical endurance. You will come here every day around this time and be ready to swim. You will be in that water swimming for about five hours. Be ready. And I want to see you swimming,” Ebon explained, the last sentence directed at Freya.

“I’ll be swimming. I like to swim,” Freya muttered softly.

Ebon ignored her. “All right, everyone in. Just throw your clothes over there.” Ebon motioned to the three blankets.

Everyone shed their clothes and tossed them over onto the three blankets. The three boys charged into the water like little kids. Freya watched them nervously, then followed. I walked around the lake and stared into the waters. I was nervous. I had not forgotten the ice incident.

Cool, calm waters returned my stare, if that was possible.

“You must overcome fear,” Ebon said. He then shoved me into the water.

At first I panicked as the cold waters enveloped me. Then I felt someone grab me and pull me up.

“Come on, Frat, swim!” Freya said. “Do I have to save you again?”

Great. That was all I needed. To be in debt with Freya again.

“No, I’m fine,” I said, managing to keep myself afloat. I looked over at Freya, and managed to keep myself from staring.

“Well, don’t just float there. Ebon said swim!” Freya said. Then, with a powerful kick, she began to swim underwater.

Unfortunately for me the kick had sent water straight into my mouth and nose. I sneezed, then dived under. Freya swam like a fish, and she was an excellent swimmer. She was swimming toward the bottom. I decided to follow, though I was much clumsier in the water.

The bottom of the lake was teaming with life. Seaweed and other water plants swayed in the gentle waters. Fish swam toward the greens, searching for small creatures that lived within the plants. Snapping turtles looked up curiously at Freya and I as we came close. Small, alligator-like critters bared their teeth and snapped. One of them caught onto Freya’s foot. Startled, I watched as she accidentally opened her mouth and sucked in a bunch of water. I swam over and kicked the critter off her. I then grabbed her and forced her up to the surface.

Freya was choking and gasping for breath. I heard Ebon mutter “Foolish girl”, but he sounded utterly

disappointed that she wasn't dead. Typical.
"Well, you're not in debt to me anymore," Freya said between gasps. 'Ebon is looking at me, is he?'
I looked around and quickly located Ebon. "Yes, he is."
"Oh no," Freya moaned. 'I'm going to be smacked the minute I get out of this damn water.'
"Maybe he'll forget in five hours," I suggested.
"Maybe he'll love women and take me out to dinner in five hours," Freya snapped sarcastically. "I'm doomed."
Unfortunately, Freya was probably right. Ebon would take any excuse to smack Freya. Normally he didn't smack without reason. Too bad his reasons were stupid.
"Well, we might as well not worry about it. Otherwise we're both going to be punished for not swimming," I said.
"Yeah, but I'm going to be smacked while you'll just be yelled at," Freya moaned. She began to swim slowly on her back, staring at the cloudy sky.
"Freya if you get rain in your eyes and blind yourself, don't blame me," I joked.
Freya laughed and nearly sank. She splashed water in my face.
"Trying to kill me?" she asked.
"Why would I bother? You can flip me over your

back, for God's sake!" I said.
"Oh yeah," Freya said thoughtfully.
"Oh jeez, keep away from me!"
At this point Freya had a very keen interest in flipping me over her back, and I was making a desperate attempt to get way. Unfortunately, she was a faster swimmer, and I was having trouble keeping away.
"Come back her, Fwatty!" Freya chirped.
"Fwatty? Okay, Frat I'll deal with, but not Fwatty!" I shouted.
"Aww, why not? It's cute!" Freya chirped.
"How old are you again, Freya?"
"Thirteen."
"That's what you think!"
"Aww, now that's just plain mean!"
"I know."
"I'm going to get you for that, Frat! Maybe I'll even tickle you for it!"
"CRAP!"
At this point I was making an extra-hard attempt to swim better than Freya was. I dived under, thinking that maybe I could use the bottom of the lake to my advantage. Then again, Freya already got bitten once. I didn't want that to happen again, so I simply swam. Fish fluttered by, not scared of us. They were used to Burmecians in the lake. I reached out and

touched a rainbow trout. It stood still for a minute then swam away. Unfortunately for me, I had also stopped, and soon I found myself being dragged to the surface.
“Caught ya!” Freya chirped.
The next thing I knew I was hitting the water behind her with a splash.
“Ow, that smarts,” I muttered, rubbing my back.
“Of course,” Freya said, staring at me with a smirk.
“Someday I’m going to do that to you,” I warned. “You watch!”

Freya laughed. “I’m watching.”
“I didn’t mean now!” I snapped.
“Oh. Well I guess that means I get to tickle you!”

“What?! Since when?”
“Does it matter?”
“Yes! Oh crap!”
I dived under, avoiding Freya’s tackle. She only grinned down at me, the water distorting her face. I soon surfaced.
“No tickling!” I snapped.
“Yes, master!” Freya chirped, saluting me.
“Eh? Freya, you are very strange,” I told her.
“Thank you, I know. Now let’s actually start swimming. Ebon’s eyeing me.”
With a powerful kick, she was gone.

Five hours later, everyone was making an attempt to dry off and relax. I had sneaked away with two blankets, giving one to Freya and keeping the other. By now it was late morning, and the summer humidity was warning of an oncoming storms. Dark clouds gathered in the sky. Everyone was glad to be out of the water just in case lightning came.

Ebon was eyeing Freya suspiciously. As usual she had done something he didn't like, though what it could be was beyond me. She had swum throughout the entire time, and she was a great swimmer. Then I remembered how Ebon had made sure there were only four blankets. Well, he'd have to blame me for that.

"Where'd you get that?" Ebon asked Freya.

"Him," Freya motioned to me.

"Made him, didn't you?" Ebon asked.

"No," Freya replied.

"Don't lie," Ebon spat.

"I'm not lying. I wouldn't lie to you."

Ebon was dangerously close. One wrong word and Freya would have another bruise.

"Speak the truth and lower your eyes," Ebon hissed.

Freya instead stared at him even more closely. "I'm speaking the God— damn truth. It's just your fault that you don't want to believe it."

As expected, it came. Ebon gave Freya a quick

smack before walking away. I glared at Ebon as he left.
“Oh God, there’s another one,” Freya muttered softly. “I can’t even argue. I try to be polite and then he just tells me to lower my eyes. Then I lose my temper and twap.”
Freya sighed and placed her head against my shoulder.
“At this rate,” she muttered softly. ‘I’m going to be locked up with the key thrown away elsewhere.’
“Your attitude is nothing compared to the attitude of two of those boys,” I whispered softly.
“I know. They won’t do anything,” Freya muttered with a sigh.
After a few minutes everyone had dressed and was listening to Ebon talk about the importance of physical endurance.
“Oh yes, physical endurance is very important,” Freya muttered softly. ‘You’re teaching me that very quickly, Ebon.’
Poor Freya. “Physical endurance will constantly be re-teaching itself throughout your life,” Ebon lectured.
“Yes, especially by your sexist teacher,” Freya muttered. “He teaches it with smacks for the bad girls and nothing for the bad boys. Oh joy.”
I pulled Freya closed and began to rub her shoulders.

“What do you think about what’s he saying?” Freya whispered to me.
“I think he’s an asshole,” I replied.
Freya tried her best not to chuckle, but she didn’t succeed.
“What is so funny?” Ebon asked angrily.
Freya looked up at Ebon. “Nothing at all.”
Ebon’s eyes were on fire as he glared at her. “Really?”
It was too late. No matter what Freya said, she was in for it.
“It was me, Ebon,” I said before Freya could say anything. ‘I told her that I think you’re an asshole. And you know what? You are.’
Ebon’s eyes narrowed. “Get out of here, Fratley.”
“Gladly,” I snapped.
I gave Freya a quick pat on the shoulder before I rose and headed toward home. I heard someone else rise.
“You do not have permission to go anywhere,” Ebon growled.
“Shove it up your ass,” Freya snapped.
As expected, I heard flesh hit flesh. Soon, Freya was running beside me, rubbing her left cheek.
“Frat, why?” she asked. ‘When your mother finds out, she’ll kill you.’
“It’s not right,” I replied. “Why should you take the

abuse for something I said? I don't care if I have to leave. I know the benefits of having endurance anyway."

"So do I, and I wish I had more of it," Freya muttered.

I was about to reply, but it was drowned away by roaring thunder. Freya and I both looked toward the sky to see that the dark clouds had thickened in the sky. The rain was coming down more quickly, and lightning streaked down.

"Oh no, not another one!" Freya moaned.

"Let's hurry home!" I shouted.

We began to run down the sleek streets. We rushed through the Royal Gate as thunder roared. Lightning cracked and slammed into a tree in the distance. Smoke billowed from the tree, indicating a fire, but the rain would douse it soon enough.

Despite this, something made me stop.

"Was that lightning near my house?" I asked.

Freya stopped and tried to pinpoint the location. She frowned.

"It think so," she muttered.

"Crap!" I shouted.

We resumed running once more. The rain was coming down so hard it was making it difficult to see. Thunder roared every few seconds, followed by lightning streaking down from a black sky. We soon

reached my house, and I was running so quickly that I slammed straight into the door. Freya laughed and opened the door.
“Come on, foolish one,” she said teasingly, helping me to my feet.
We entered the house, Freya closing the door quickly to keep the rain out. We were both soaked. We headed up the stairs and soon found blankets being thrown in our faces.
“Dry off,” Rose said. ‘Ya will make ’oles in the wood otherwise.’
“Huh?” Freya muttered.
“Water will make the wood rot,” I explained quietly, covering my entire head with the blanket.
“Oh,” Freya replied.
“So, why are ya ’ome early?” Rose asked.
“Ebon told me ta leave,” I said.
“Oh? And why is that?” Rose asked, immediately suspicious.
You can’t hide anything from Rose.
“I called ‘im an asshole, and ’e was goin’ to blame Freya for it. So I confessed,” I told Rose, taking the blanket off my head. ‘My hair is all poofy, isn’t it?’
Freya looked up and grinned. “You look like you just woke up!”
Rose sighed. “Fratley, why did ya say that? I know Ebon’s an ass but ya definitely don’t say it near him!

Don’t tell me all the years spent trying to discipline ya are going to end up in vain.”
“Oh great, here she goes again,” I muttered, combing my shoulder— length hair with my fingers. ‘Mamá, ya did fine raisin’ me! Jeez!’
“Then why don’t ya prove it?” Rose snapped.
“Oh, Great Dragon, ’elp me!” I muttered.
Freya laughed, as she took the blanket and threw it into the small bathroom. Rose rolled her eyes at my comment. I also threw the blanket into the bathroom, then proceeded to try and get my hair into a halfway decent state.
“Stupid hair,” I muttered.
“Ya would ’ave a lot less trouble with it if ya would just let me —” Rose began.
“I’m not lettin’ ya cut my hair!” I snarled. ‘Ya cut ye hair first!’
“I’m not cutting my hair,” Rose snapped.
“Neither am I!” I replied, still finger-combing my hair.
“Crazy lunatic,” Rose muttered. She handed Freya a wet piece of cloth. “’Ere. For the latest of your bruises. What’d ’e smack ya for this time?”
Freya muttered a soft thank you as she held the cloth up against her cheek. “First one is from trying to defend myself about using a blanket to dry and off and I lost my temper a bit. Second one is for

choosing to leave with Fratley."
Rose sighed. "Always something."
"She 'as bigger problems. 'Er mothe' is noticin' the bruises and she thinks it's me," I said.
Rose looked over at Freya. "Your mother doesn't know about Ebon?"
"N-No," Freya said slowly. 'I never told her b-because she'd freak.'
"Relax, I'm not going to kill ya," Rose said gently. "But your mother thinks it's Fratley?"
"Yes," Freya replied.
Rose sighed. "Guess I need to give Ebon a talking-to."
"What?" I asked, surprised.
Rose was already heading into her bedroom.
"A talking-to! 'E needs it!" Rose called.
"But 'e'll cream ya!" I protested, racing into the bedroom.
"E's not creaming anybody," Rose said.
She was placing her twin javelins safely within her sleeves. She tied leather twine around her wrists to keep the hidden javelins from moving. She grabbed her leather jacket and put it on.
"Rain is 'arsh?" she asked me. I nodded. "Right, then."
Rose left the room. She looked over at me.
"Ya stay 'ere, okay?" she said. I nodded. "Good."

Rose nodded at me, then at Freya. She then descended the stairs and left the house.
“She’s an amazing person, your mother,” Freya said with admiration. She took the cloth and placed it near the sink. ‘I suppose I’d better head home.’
“Ya can stay ’ere. No one will mind,” I assured.
“Oh, I know, but my mother’s going to be worried sick. I really shouldn’t let her worry. Frat, I’m sorry to leave so suddenly,” Freya muttered.
“It’s all right,” I immediately said.
“Frat,” Freya muttered softly. She gave me a kiss on the cheek. “Good bye.”
Her voice was soft like an angel’s, and that was what she indeed seemed like as she descended the stairs and left the house. She seemed heavenly, pure, God-like.
My angel.

——— Aww, how sweet — I think. Anyway, just so you know, you’re supposed to hate Ebon *evil grin* Anyway, will Freya’s family problems be settled? Will Ebon somehow become nicer by a miracle? Can Rose knock some sense into everyone? (Go Rose! Go Rose! *Cough* Er, sorry) Anyway, stay tuned!

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Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven
Beating

Two weeks later I woke up before dawn, ready to spend five hours swimming. Though it left me exhausted, it did seem to be helping everyone get stronger. Besides, Freya's comical antics were funny, and she was helping me learn to swim better.
I began to prepare tea, as usual. I then sat at the table. I wanted to go and check on Freya, but it would not work. Freya's mother was terribly suspicious of me, and I had learned to stay away from her house. Freya would come to me.
I sighed and rose from the table. It seemed oddly lonely without Freya. Normally she would come along at this time, but for the past three days she hadn't. In fact, for the past three days she had just managed to come on time for Dragon Academy, and Ebon had smacked her for supposedly "coming late".
I took a mug from the cabinet, and grabbed a packet of tea from the jar on the counter. I put them on the table, then realized I had forgotten a spoon and retrieved it from the cabinet. By now the water was

boiling, and I poured it into the mug. I inserted the tea packet into the mug and began stirring the tea. My thoughts were on Freya and her problems. She had her mother worrying, Ebon smacking her, and then her odd sister Arana acting like she wanted to kill her.

I had been so busy thinking I didn't realize I had been stirring the tea for three minutes. Quickly I grabbed the mug and drank the tea in one sitting despite the burn. I took the mug and placed it in the sink. I then descended the stairs and headed outside. Even though the sun had not risen anywhere on the Mist Continent, the humidity was already close to unbearable. The rain didn't help with the humidity. It was warm, warning of a storm. I headed down the dark streets, heading toward the lake, as usual.

I was the first to arrive at the lake and received a brief nod of acknowledge from Ebon. I sat down near the lake's quiet waters, watching the distance for signs of Freya.

About fifteen minutes passed, and the boys had showed up. Freya had not. I took a deep breath, waiting nervously. Would she come just in the nick of time again? If so, another slap was to come. She didn't show up. Ebon gave us the normal instructions. The boys immediately shed and headed into the water. I stayed sitting, waiting for Freya.

Ebon glared at me, but I ignored him. Freya was never late. She made sure she was never late. What could have happened?

Ten minutes passed. Someone then appeared. They were running swiftly over here. I recognized Freya immediately. I rose to my feet, only to find Ebon pushing me down to the ground.

“Stay down and don’t interfere,” Ebon growled.

Freya had reached Ebon at this point. She was looking at him with worried eyes.

“I’m sorry,” she muttered.

She didn’t get anything else out. Ebon punched her hard in the face, causing her to fall to the ground. I tensed angrily.

“You were told not to be late,” Ebon growled. “You will be punished.”

Ebon slammed his fist into Freya’s chest. Freya let out a startled gasp. My eyes widened with shock. Freya made an attempt to defend herself as Ebon’s punches and kicks rained down on her, but it was useless. Ebon said she would be punished, but I didn’t expect this, for some reason.

Ebon was beating her.

Instinctively my fur bristled, causing me to look more polar bear than Burmecian. My normally placid blue eyes became fiery with anger. I rose to my feet, fists clenched. I was watching for a time

when I could get in.
Finally, after a few minutes, I saw an opportunity. Ebon had his fist raised. I rushed forward and pushed Freya out of the way. Ebon couldn't stop himself in time and his fist slammed into my jaw, slamming me into the ground.
It hurt worse than I had thought. The sharp pain the punch left caused me to kick out, latching onto Ebon's leg. I threw him to the ground. I then rose to my feet just in time to see Freya running away.
I looked over at Ebon.
"Don't you dare leave," Ebon snarled.
He was too late. I was already running after Freya. My feet pounded against the wet ground as I chased after her. She ran straight for the woods, a perfect place for her to hide.
"Freya!" I shouted.
Freya kept running. The minute both of us were in the woods, Freya turned and looked at me. Her eyes were full of tears. Her face was bruised, and her body probably was as well. I could see her shaking.
"F-Fratley," she muttered. "I can't stand this. M-My mother tries to keep me away from my dreams. T-Then I escape and I-I get the shit beaten out o-of me. Can't I do anything anymore?"
I walked slowly over to Freya.
"Freya," I muttered, only finding I had nothing to

say.
Freya collapsed into my arms. She was sobbing uncontrollably, something I had rarely ever seen her do. Slowly I lowered her and myself to the ground. She lied against me, sobbing helplessly. I held her against me, trying to comfort her. I knew it was hopeless. She couldn't be comforted at this rate. She was crushed.
I don't know how much time passed with Freya sobbing. I didn't know what to do. Never had Freya been this upset. Even the last time she had cried she had eventually stopped after five minutes. Now, more than five minutes had passed without her even ceasing to stop.
"Freya," I muttered softly. "It's all right."
Of course, it wasn't all right. Ebon had never beaten her before. He had smacked her, but never actually beaten her.
"F-Fratley, I'm sick o-of being treated like s-shit," Freya choked out between heaving sobs. 'Why c-can't anyone let me do what I wish?'
"Freya, I do," I whispered. "I don't care what you do, as long as you're still you. Freya — Freya, I hate seeing you this upset."
Freya looked up at me with tearful eyes. "I'm sorry."
"No need to apologize," I muttered. "Ebon is the one who should apologize."

Freya wiped away her tears, only to find they came back. She stared at me.
“I got you all wet,” she muttered, trying desperately to stop crying.
I shrugged. “I think the rain makes me wetter than this, Freya.”
“Yeah — Yeah, I guess so,” Freya said quietly. ‘How much time has passed?’
“I don’t even know, Freya.”
“I-I’m tried of this place, Frat. I’m sick of it all.”
Freya’s sobbing began again, and I held her closer. We were oblivious to the humidity and rain. All I noticed was Freya. I don’t know if Freya noticed anything.
It was another five minutes or so before Freya showed signs of calming down. I slowly released my grip on Freya. She rose to her feet, I following. She looked toward the gate.
“Maybe,” She said, taking a deep, ragged breath. ‘I can run away.’
“Run away?” I asked with worry.
“Yeah. Just a little bit. See if the outside world is any better,” Freya muttered.
“Freya, don’t go anywhere,” I begged.
“You can come if you want.”
“Come? But Freya —”
“We won’t go far. I just need to take a walk outside

this place.” Freya looked toward me with upset green eyes. ‘Please?’
I looked down at the ground. “All right, Freya. But let’s be careful.”
Freya nodded slowly. She began to slowly walk toward the Main Gate. I followed quietly. We stepped through the woods and onto the sleek streets. Freya was walking in an almost ghost-like manner. No one was willing to walk around in the humidity yet, so not many people were around. We swerved between houses and through yards and alleys. Sometimes we even leapt over roofs to get to our destination.
When we reached the Main Gate, it was open slightly. Freya and I easily squeezed through the small opening. We looked around with awe. Outside was a vast expanse of green land that became brownish sand in the distance. The massive tree of Cleyra could be seen in the distance. Massive mountains isolated the Daines-Horse Basin from the rest of the world. Stepping carefully into the unknown territory only a bit away from our home, we looked around in all directions. We had never seen the area outside home before.
“It’s so free,” Freya muttered. “No restricting walls or buildings. It’s just a bunch of nothing.”
I nodded in agreement. Except for the steady green

grasses and an occasional tree or two, the area appeared desolate. We stopped walking, being a few good feet away from Burmecia. The humidity did not seem as bad outside the city, being the air had more time to roam. The rain fell just as endlessly as it did in Burmecia.

“So green,” Freya muttered. ‘God, I wonder if people live out here?’

“It looks too lifeless,” I replied.

Freya was walking around aimlessly, examining the area. I was looking around suspiciously. Something wasn’t right. The place was too quiet.

“Freya, perhaps we should head back. Something’s not right,” I said.

Freya looked over at me. She seemed to notice my worried look.

“All right,” she said, though clearly disappointed.

We turned around and began heading back toward Burmecia. Freya was staring at the ground. I was trying to listen for any sudden moves. I heard the rustling of bushes, and then the steady pounding of massive feet.

“Freya?” I whispered. ‘Do you hear that?’

“Hear —” Freya began, but she was cut off by a massive roar.

Slowly we turned around. Standing behind us was a massive green creature with a brown underbelly and

chest. Its feet had to be the size of the doorway of an average house. Small claws came from these massive feet. It had huge bulky legs and massive shoulders that made it look much larger than it really was. Its head was tiny compared to its massive body, and small horns were on this head. Its actual body appeared thin, but its thighs were massive just like its shoulders to support huge legs and large feet. It had a small tail. It roared angrily at it, rearing upward on its massive hind legs and crushing the ground with large front feet.

“Run,” I muttered.

Freya and I turned around and began to rush toward Burmecia. The monster roared and ran toward us. It was far quicker than we were, and Freya and I soon had to head in opposite directions besides forward to escape it. It slowed to a stop, looking around with tiny black eyes for a target. It located Freya, roared, and charged toward her. Freya let out a startled yelp and ran out of the way. The beast roared, lightning gathering at its horns. It then sent the lightning toward Freya. Freya was hit and knocked to the ground.

I ran forward.

“HEY YOU!” I screamed at the monster, trying to distract it. “OVER HERE! COME HERE!”

The monster looked over at me and roared. It then charged. I ran out of the way and scraped at its leg with my long nails. They succeeded in cutting small, skimpy scratches that bled little. The monster apparently wasn't pleased, however, for it turned around and charged toward me. I tried to rush completely out of the way, but I ended up being smacked by the monster's deep, low chest. I fell to the ground and managed to avoid any other damage.

Freya had weakly risen to her feet, and the monster had chosen her as a target. I rose to my feet and began shouting again. The monster turned around and snarled angrily. It then charged. I began to run, but mud had gathered in certain areas. My foot landed in a mud puddle and I almost fell over. I found myself stuck right in the monster's path.

Seconds before the first large hoof fell upon me I was shoved out of the way. I immediately looked up and watched in horror as Freya was trampled.

"FREYA!" I screamed.

The monster made a massive turn as it located me. I stared at it with horror. It roared and charged.

Suddenly a lance shot through the air at a blinding speed and latched itself into the monster's neck. It roared with pain and stumbled about, trying to find the thrower. Soon, two more lances punctured its chest and side. The monster screamed and tried to go

after me, the only person around who seemed dangerous. I rushed out of the panicked, bleeding monster's way. It staggered about, and soon a fourth lance slammed into its eye. The monster screamed and collapsed.

Meanwhile, I rushed over to Freya. I lifted her into my arms as I stared with horror. Tears came to my eyes. Her shirt had been ripped near her stomach, and a gruesome bruise was forming quickly. Was she going to die? Was she already dead? What would happen? I began to sob.

Behind me, someone walked toward me. Soon, Aireff was beside me.

"Calm down, all right, Fratley?" he said, gently taking Freya into his own arms. "She's goin' ta be fine."

I didn't bother asking where Aireff came from and how he knew she'd be fine. I simply stayed where I was, sobbing. Aireff rose to his feet and walked away. Soon, Rose was beside me.

"Fratley, calm down," she muttered softly.

"How can anyone expect me to calm down?" I choked.

"Freya's going to be fine, Fratley. Junes isn't a healer for nothing, you know," Rose muttered softly.

"He couldn't help Angela," I sobbed.

Rose was silent for a while. "No, 'e couldn't. But

Freya isn't in Angela's situation. Freya can be saved." Rose lifted me to my feet. 'Come on. Let's get back 'ome before another Catoblepas comes along.'
"Mamá, are you mad?" I asked, looking up at Rose.
"Why should I be mad? Despite the dangers no one teaches their children not to go outside the gates. We seem to think that they are born knowing the dangers. Fratley, why should I be mad?" Rose asked, looking over at me. "Why should I be mad at you for something you were never disciplined against?"

In the end, it seemed like Freya would end up all right. There had been internal bleeding, which explained the massive bruise, but Junes stopped it quickly with herbs. She had a few broken ribs, though whether Ebon or the Catoblepas had caused them was uncertain. He also gave her some pain-killing herbs. When I went to see her, she looked exhausted, but smiled at me.
"Hey, Frat," Freya muttered softly.
I was getting pretty close to tears. "Freya, I'm sorry."
"Why are you apologizing? I was the one who suggested leaving," Freya said. "And it's not your fault you fell in mud."
I shook my head. I just felt guilt, though for what

reason I could not say. Something within me was guilty. I reached down and hugged Freya without her having to move.
“I don’t know,” I muttered. “I just hope you make it.”
Freya gave me a quick kiss on the cheek before I rose.
“I’m sure I’ll make it,” Freya said quietly. “I can deal with Ebon, so I can deal with an over-sized green freak. After all, they are the same — both ugly and stupid.”
I couldn’t help but chuckle. Perhaps Freya would be fine. At this point Freya’s mother rushed in.
“You!” she snapped at me. ‘You got Freya into this, didn’t you?’
I stared at her with complete confusion. “No —”
“Don’t lie! Ever since she started hanging around with you consistently she’s been coming home bruised. And now she looks like this! What have you been doing to her?” Marie asked angrily.
I backed away from Marie nervously. I hadn’t been doing a single thing.
“I swear —” I began.
“Answer me!” Marie snarled.
“Marie, calm down,” Rose said, realizing I needed her assistance. ‘Fratley ’asn’t done anything. It’s Ebon.’

“Ebon?” Marie asked.
“Yes,” Rose said, nodding. ‘Freya ’as ’eaded off against your will to become a Dragon Warrior. Ebon’s ’arsh, particularly with Freya, and ’e is the one that is smacking ’er around. And apparently ’e was at it again.’
“Ebon,” Marie muttered. She then turned angrily on Freya. “I told you that was too dangerous! Why don’t you listen to me?”
Freya’s eyes narrowed.
“It’s my life!” she snarled.
“I told you not to become a Dragon Warrior! How dare you disobey me,” Marie snarled. ‘You’re getting pretty close to being stuck at home.’
“If you keep her at home, Marie, she’ll only escape. Then Ebon will beat her,” Aireff said calmly, his familiar accent gone. “At the rate your child is going, you would be much better off to simply let her go to the training. Fratley is there.”
“Fratley — Fratley, have you done anything?” Marie asked me angrily.
“Yes!” Freya immediately said. “Leave him alone, Mom! He hasn’t done anything! It’s all me! I wanted to become a Dragon Warrior! I wanted to leave Burmecia! He’s only been supporting me and helping me out! If it weren’t for him, I may have been beaten senseless by Ebon! Don’t you see the

bruise? He shoved me out of the way!”
All eyes came on me. Immediately everyone located the swelling bruise on my snout that came from Ebon’s powerful punch. I shrunk away against the wall, wishing I could go straight through it. Marie’s angry look disappeared while Rose headed into the healer’s bathroom. Aireff looked over at Marie to see what she would say.
“All right,” Marie muttered quietly. ‘I apologize for accusing you, Fratley. I didn’t know.’
“It’s all right,” I automatically said.
“As for you,” Marie said, turning her gaze on Freya. “It doesn’t seem that I can do anything to stop you from doing much. So fine, you can go train. Just, please, be careful.”
Freya nodded. Rose had reentered the room and gave me the cold, wet cloth she had retrieved. It muttered a soft thank you and placed it against the swollen bruise. Aireff was nodding with silent approval at Marie’s decision. Rose stood near him, also taking in the scene. Marie sighed.
“I’d better get home before Matthew sets fire to the food again,” she muttered. “I’ll be back, Freya.”
Marie gave her daughter a quick hug before leaving.
“Well, at last she got a bit o’ sense,” Aireff said, his accent returning.
“I have a question to ask,” Freya said.

“What is it?” Aireff asked.
“I was still a bit conscious when the monster was attacked. Was it only you two?” Freya asked.
Smiles crossed the faces of my parents.
“Yep, only us,” Aireff said. ‘Like our quick throwin’ abilities?’
“Quick showing off, Aireff,” Rose said, smacking him playfully.
“Oh dear, m’ wife is beatin’ me. Someone ’elp!” Aireff yelped teasingly.
“Oh, hush,” Rose snapped. She then turned to Freya. ‘Yes, it was only the two of us.’
“Oh,” Freya said. She took a deep breath, and the pain-killing plants clearly did not work hard enough to stop the pain she felt when breathing. “How did you know?”
“Fratley was screamin’,” Aireff said. ‘It was a good way to get ’elp.’
“I was actually distracting the monster,” I explained. “It didn’t like loud sounds.”
“Nah, some of ‘em don’,” Aireff said with agreement. ‘If ya ‘ave no weapons, that’s one o’ the best things ya can do. Scream and wave around. If ya keep it up, ya can scare some away. Not a Catoblepas, though. It’ll jus’ kill ya.’
“I noticed,” I muttered.
“Wonder what it was doin’ ’round this area,” Rose

muttered thoughtfully.
“Probably Treno,” Aireff said with a snort. ‘That stupid shop with the monsters probably released it.’
“Maybe,” Rose muttered. She then looked over at Freya. “All right, so it’s very clear that Ebon needs more than a talking-to?”
Freya nodded. “A lot more.”
Rose grinned wickedly. “Coming right up.”
Rose quickly left the room, and I immediately voiced my opinion.
“I hope she really hurts him.”

———— Poor Freya =(Anyway, doesn’t matter, because this time Ebon’s really in for it. *evil grin* Next chapter is going to be pretty exciting. I’ll try not to give anything away, but let me just say this: Freya gets revenge.

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Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight
Of Martial Arts and Revenge

Whatever Rose had chosen to do to Ebon had worked. Come to think of it, what she had chosen to do was obvious. He was looking rather injured the next time we saw him. He didn't dare to acknowledge Freya, and completely left her alone unless she really needed discipline, which was rare. Meanwhile Freya slowly recovered from the attacks, but it was clear that her mind would not forget.

Months passed, and soon November came with its light rain and cooling temperatures. By now the lake was near being frozen, and Ebon had decided to start on a new physical advantage: martial arts.

I woke up just as dawn came. Ebon had told us to come to the lake by noon. By then the temperatures would be halfway decent and we wouldn't freeze to death — or at least Ebon wouldn't. I yawned lazily as I rose to my feet and quickly looked out the window. The rain was light, but that meant the temperatures would be colder. I reminded myself to dress warmer.

I headed into the kitchen to find it bitter cold.

Immediately I walked over to the fireplace. The fire had died during the night, and Aireff clearly had not woken up to get it ready. I grabbed the flint and rock on the mantle and within a few quick strokes had a soft fire roaring. I grabbed an extra stick and encouraged the fire to become larger. Soon, it was taking up the entire fireplace. I sat in front of the flames for a while, trying to warm myself up. I then rose and walked over to the cabinet that held the water Rose had gathered during the summer. I took a leather sack containing water, poured the water into a pot, then set the fireproof pot above the flickering flames of the fire to hang on the iron bar.

I sat down at the table, thinking over my plans for today. Everything would hopefully go as planned. I stared at the fire, thinking over the plan. I then rose to my feet and headed into my bedroom. Without disturbing Ruben I took my Gil pouch out from under his bed. It was full of the Gil I had saved up. I took it out into the kitchen with me, where I discovered the water to be well beyond boiling point and going into the “overflow and put out the fire” stage.

Only seven minutes later, I was stepping outside and into the cold air of November morning. I tightly had wrapped my warm, waterproof jacket, but even the soft furs that covered the inside didn’t seem to help.

I jogged through the sleek streets, hoping to get myself warmer. Hopefully Freya's house would offer some warmth.

Thanks to my brisk jog I reached Freya's house in minutes. I didn't bother knocking. Freya and I visited each other so often we didn't knock and simply barged right in. Our parents didn't care, being they knew whom to expect.

Freya's house was considerably warmer, considering Arana had woken up early. She was sitting at the table, eating at the table. We only acknowledged each other with a brief nod. It was a very warm greeting when it came to the two of us.

I headed up the stairs and into the small hallway. Freya's mother had enough money to afford a three-bedroom house and keep it, though how she managed is beyond me. My parents were Dragon Warriors and the house they had was plainer than Freya's house. But it meant we had better food, clothing, and supplies.

I quietly stepped into Freya's room, which she shared with Arana. It held merely two beds, a bureau, and a small fireplace built for warmth and light. Arana had had enough heart to start a small fire so Freya wouldn't be freezing. This was pretty nice, considering Arana.

Freya was sleeping peacefully, which didn't surprise

me. She didn’t get up until someone woke her up. I looked down at her, sleeping peacefully. She was apparently dreaming; she was snoring. Freya, for some reason, only snored when she was dreaming. I found it humorous, but Arana found it very annoying and was constantly trying to get her to stop. Come to think of it, Arana tried to stop everything.

Freya rolled over in her sleep, nearly squashing her tail in the process. She grabbed for something in her sleep and ended up grabbing a pillow. She then threw it. I moved out of the way of the pillow and it slammed against the wall. Freya then muttered something in her sleep.

I only smiled with amusement as I walked over to Freya.

“Come on, Freya. Quit throwing pillows and wake up,” I muttered, tapping her on the shoulder.

Freya’s opinion was yawning lazily in her sleep. I chuckled softly and tapped her on the shoulder again. If I had to, I would shout.

My persistent tapping was succeeding in waking Freya up. She yawned again and opened her eyes halfway. She took one look at me and made an attempt to hide under the pillow.

“You’re too awake in the morning,” she grumbled.

I laughed. “At least I don’t hide under pillows.”

“When you’re fourteen, Fratley, I’m going to get revenge on you!” Freya grumbled, taking the pillow and throwing it in my face.
I laughed. “Yeah, if you’ll get up, that is.”
If there’s one thing that will get Freya up, it’s lightly insulting her. Soon I was on the floor, staring up at Freya’s sleepy yet annoyed face.
“Ha ha, Frat,” she snapped. ‘Now what are you going to do?’
I shoved the Gil pouch in front of Freya. “Give you your birthday present.”
“Holy,” Freya muttered, taking the pouch and sitting on my legs. ‘How much is in here?’
“I’ll tell you once you get off me.”
Freya crawled off me, allowing me to rise into a sitting position.
“There’s 3500 in there,” I said. ‘I figured that before we go and deal with Ebon the Ass I’d take you shopping and allow you to go nuts. Well, if you’re interested — which I know you are.’
“Sweet!” Freya chirped. “Thanks!”
Freya gave me a quick kiss on the cheek before she bounded out of the room. I chuckled softly. Women were so easy to please. All you needed to do was give them money and a day shopping and they would love you forever. Freya was no exception, except perhaps in what she bought.

I left the room and quickly headed downstairs. Freya was eating some bread while bickering bitterly with Arana. What they were bickering about didn't exactly matter. They would bicker about anything and everything that could be bickered about — even stuff that couldn't be bickered about.
Freya immediately offered me some food, but I denied it. I never was hungry in the morning; my appetite would come by lunch. I simply sat down at the table and as far away from Arana as possible. Freya was eating as quickly as she could without choking. I rolled my eyes, chuckling.
"Take a break, Freya," I said.
Freya glared at me, and I only smiled.

About an hour later Freya and I were heading toward the Marketsquare. It was right outside the Royal Gate and near the lake. Any person who lived around the Marketsquare usually made and sold goods. A few soldiers also lived around the Marketsquare, but usually their wives were able to do a little handy work.
Already a few shops were open. Freya glanced around. She then headed toward a small stand littered with weapons. The man owning the shop was a 20-year-old with two kids running around and under the stand. Freya headed over to the shop and

examined a few of the weapons. They appeared to be knuckles, whips, and poles with very few blades.
“How much do you usually charge?” Freya asked.
“Depends on the condition of the weapon you want to buy,” the man said quietly. “But usually the knuckles are around 500, the whips 560, and the poles 800 or more depending on length.”
Freya nodded. She picked up a pole that was as long as she was tall. She spun it around wildly.
“How much is this?” Freya asked.
“1000,” the man replied.
Freya took the pouch I had given her and handed him 1000 Gil.
“These things are handy,” Freya said. ‘You can trip people.’
“People like Ebon,” I muttered.
“Yep,” Freya said cheerfully.
Freya only stopped by two more shops. She then bounded off toward the lake, I following.
“That’s it?” I asked with amusement.
“Nothing good this time of year,” Freya replied. ‘No one’s at the lake yet.’
“Too early. We have a few good hours to wait,” I replied. A sharp wind passed by, and I shivered. “Aren’t you cold?”
Freya looked over at me. She had chosen to wear her typical outfit, with only a light coat over it. “No.

Why?”
“Because I am and I have this thing!” I said, showing Freya the fluffy inside of my coat.
Freya grinned. “You’re pathetic.”
We walked down to the lake, only to find that no one was risking the cold to hang about. Freya took a quick look around the area.
“No one,” Freya muttered. She then looked at me with a warm smile. ‘You want to practice?’
“Practice?” I asked.
“Martial Arts. Do you know any?” Freya asked.
“A little,” I replied.
“Well, do you want to practice?” Freya asked.
“Oh, well, I guess,” I said with a shrug.
“All right, then.”
At this point Freya surprised me. She shed her clothes until she was only dressed in her white cloth pants and sleeveless shirt. She rolled her fleece pants and shirt into a ball, stuffed it into her leather coat, and threw the entire thing aside.
“Aren’t you going to be cold?” I asked.
“No, you’re going to be hot. Believe me, when you spar you get very hot regardless of the weather,” Freya explained as she tried to tie her hair back with a ribbon. She looked over at me and smiled. “Stupid hair. Oh, and quit staring, Frat. It’s rude.”
I gave myself a smack in the forehead. How Freya

could deal with me is beyond me.
“Well, are you ready?” Freya asked. She had managed to tie her hair back.
I nodded. Freya took a deep breath and began to slowly approach.
“All right. Lesson one.”
Freya threw something aside, and I looked to see what it was. The next thing I knew, I was on the ground, Freya standing over me with a smirk on her face.
“Never look away from you opponent,” Freya finished, allowing me to rise.
I didn’t say anything. I simply rose to my feet and tried to attack Freya. She flipped out of the way and grounded me so quickly I could barely believe it.
“How? —” I began.
“Practice,” Freya replied. “Come on, get up.”
I rose to my feet.
“All right, try again,” Freya said.
I made an attempt to kick Freya. She met my kick with her arm and sent me flipping onto the ground stomach-first with an upward jerk.
“Oww, that smarts,” I muttered, rising painfully to my feet.
Freya’s fist slammed into my face and I hit the ground again.
“All right, now that’s unfair,” I commented.

Freya smirked. “Be careful.”

I kicked my legs out, caught one of Freya’s, and threw her to the ground. Freya quickly rose to her feet. I also leapt to my feet, and just managed to dodge one of Freya’s kicks. I made an attempt to tackle her, but Freya flipped out of the way. She then slammed her body into me, and I toppled to the ground. By now, however, I was quite awake, and I quickly rose to my feet and slammed my fist into Freya’s face. Freya backed up, then kicked out with both her feet and hit me square in the chest. I fell to the ground, and it took me a few more seconds that usual to get up.

I rose carefully to my feet and tried to deliver a back-blow. Freya met it with her arms. She then brought one foot up and kicked me away. She tried to punch me, but I met it with my arm in a copy of her own movement. It hurt a lot more than Freya made it look. I backed up a bit, and Freya leapt in the air, delivering a spinning kick that sent me flipping to the ground.

Freya was right, though; I would be hot. Already I was sweating. I took off my jacket and put it aside. I then rolled away from Freya and to my feet. Freya rushed forward, but I ran out of the way and kicked her. Freya staggered backward, and I slammed my fist into her shoulder. Freya slipped and fell.

“You’re getting pretty good,” Freya commented, rising to her feet.
I rushed forward, hoping to knock her over. Freya cartwheeled away. She kept cartwheeling until she reached her pole. She slowly began to approach, spinning the pole around in front of her. I watched her warily. Slowly Freya brought the pole to a stop. That was when I rushed forward.
Suddenly I was on the ground, my ankle screaming with pain.
“Ah crap,” I muttered, rising into a sitting position. I tried to rise, but my ankle gave way and I slid back to the ground.
“You all right?” Freya asked, kneeling beside me. “I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to hurt you —”
“I’m all right,” I muttered, but my ankle was proving to be otherwise. It was beginning to swell.
“Yeah right. It looks bad,” Freya said with worry. ‘Maybe you should go home.’
“No, I’ll be fine,” I muttered. The pain in my ankle was now very dull, but I couldn’t move it.
Freya rose to her feet and rushed over to her jacket. She took a cloth from it and walked over to the lake. I made another attempt to rise, and this time succeeded. I limped over to Freya.
“Fratley, sit down,” Freya said. She squeezed the water out of the cloth and handed it to me.

I placed the cloth against my swelling ankle. “Freya, it’s okay, I’m not mad.”
“Fratley, I hurt you!” Freya replied.
I shrugged. “Not like we meant to kill each other. Remember, we were sparring. Sometimes these things happen.”
“What are you doing?”
My muscles tensed at the new voice. I looked over at Ebon, who had just appeared.
“Freya and I were sparring,” I explained. ‘We’re just recovering.’
“Be careful, Fratley,” Ebon said quietly. “If you are not better by the time we’re set I’ll send you home.”
I nodded, causing Ebon to walk away. He didn’t even bother to acknowledge Freya. He never did. When she tried to participate and seem like a good student, he’d ignore her. When she did anything that would previously get her a smack, he ignored her. No matter what Freya did, she was ignored. I expected Freya to like this, but it upset her. She tried to please Ebon, but he ignored her, and it seemed to hurt Freya more than his smacks had.
“Look at me,” Freya snapped at Ebon, but he ignored her.

A few hours later, everyone had gathered. I hadn’t fully recovered, but I refused to tell Ebon. I

instead limped over when he wasn't looking and sat down near the three boys. Freya sat beside me, fretting over me like Rose would. It was annoying, but at the same time touching to know she cared that much.

"Today we will practice one of the first techniques all Dragon Warriors learn: martial arts. Martial arts can be used for offensive fighting, but it is mostly a self-defense mechanism. There are times when a Dragon Warrior is caught off-guard and without a weapon. He will turn to martial arts until help or a weapon can be gained," Ebon explained, immediately causing yawns and bored looks. "You can choose your own partners, but one of you must be partners with me, as there aren't enough of us."

Then, suddenly Ebon's eyes locked with Freya's. They stared at each other endlessly.

"You may choose your partners and practice the moves I taught you," Ebon said slowly, still staring at Freya. "Go."

Two of the boys immediately stood up and headed into to a different area. Freya and Ebon will still staring at each other. The last boy walked slowly over to me.

"Hey," he said, and I detected the shyness in his voice. "You wanna be partners wit me?"

I was a little shocked. Out of all the attitudes I had

dreamed the boys to have, I did not expect a shy one.

“I’m afraid I’m not going to be much of an opponent,” I said regretfully, carefully bringing out my swollen ankle for him to see. ‘I had a bit of an accident when sparring.’

“Oh,” the boy said, but he only sounded relieved. “Well, that’s all right. I’m pretty useless, injured ankle or not.”

I smiled slightly. “Oh, I see. Well, I think we’d better move anyway.”

I rose to my feet. The boy and I walked over to the lake. Freya had risen to her feet. She was watching Ebon. The two were stiff. Freya’s eyes narrowed, and then she suddenly struck.

Freya’s foot plowed into Ebon’s chest and knocked him straight to the ground. Ebon quickly rose to his feet and tried to return her blow, but Freya blocked it with her arms. She then brought her arm out in a slamming hit. Ebon staggered backward, then brought out his foot and kicked Freya in the stomach. Freya fell to her knees, but quickly got back up to slam her foot into Ebon’s stomach.

Everyone was watching the fight. I couldn’t help but smirk as I watched the fight. Freya was getting her revenge. Ebon wasn’t strong enough.

Within a few minutes, Freya had picked up her pole

and was using it to her advantage. Ebon was at a loss. He couldn't move as swift as Freya could. Soon, he was on the ground, gasping for breath with Freya standing over him. Her face was amazingly neutral.

"I beat you," she said, stepping aside.

Ebon rose to his feet. He didn't look at her. He instead turned to the rest of us.

"Keep training. I'll be back," he snapped.

Ebon began to walk away. Freya looked enraged, though I couldn't figure out why. She had just defeated him. Why was she angry?

"Ebon," she snarled. "Ebon, I want you to turn around and tell me to my face that I beat you and I am stronger than you."

Ebon's walk slowed, but never stopped. He looked down toward the ground, but never at Freya. He then resumed his normal pace, never meeting Freya's eyes.

———————— I stink at writing Martial Arts fights. Oh well, Freya got revenge on her birthday! =) Anyway, I have no clue what's going to happen in the next chapter, so there may be another delay.

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Chapter Nine

Chapter Nine
Death, Dan, and - Love?

I think that, at times, I would wonder what happened to the years.
One year had passed since Dragon Academy had started. Already it felt like 50. We were just beginning to learn how to use a few extremely simple Dragon Abilities. But it was Sunday. Religious Devotion Day. I was one of the few people outside on that day because my family was anything but religious. Ruben immediately headed off to find a girl who I honestly could imagine seeing at one of those insane bars, but I kept my opinion far from Ruben's. I instead looked for Freya, who had gone with her family to Alexandria to see a play and had supposedly returned.
I felt something was wrong, though. Freya would've bounded to my house by dawn to yap on how bad or good the play was, and give me every little detail on Alexandria. But she wasn't around. I decided to check the Academy first, thinking Ebon may be reprimanding her — the latest of his tortures.
I soon reached the Academy, to find that Freya was

leaving it. She looked over at me, and I could see the sadness in her eyes. Something had happened. I walked over to Freya.
“Hello, Frat,” Freya said quietly, walking over to me.
“’Ey, what’s wrong?” I asked, returning to my natural accent. Something about it comforted her.
Freya took a deep breath and began to walk down the path. I walked beside her. She seemed to be thinking. We walked down to a quiet alley where no one ever walked. Freya turned to me. Her eyes were full of sorrow.
“You see,” she said, taking a deep breath. “You know how we went to Alexandria?”
I nodded.
“Well,” Freya said, taking another deep breath. “It was during the show. Matthew got bored and headed off. He somehow got himself stuck in an alley and __”
Freya trailed off, staring at the ground. Tears were forming in her eyes. She took a deep breath.
“I don’t know what exactly happened, but. He died,” Freya choked out.
I stared with shock. Matthew had died? He had somehow died while stuck in an alley? It seemed so strange, yet at the same time believable.

“I just don’t understand,” Freya muttered. She then looked up at me. “Why is it always me? How come everything happens to me? What did I do?”
Freya’s shoulders were shaking. She began to sob. I held out my arms, and she collapsed against me. I didn’t understand why Freya’s life was rather harsh, either. I just hoped I could make it easier.

Freya had calmed down within five minutes, and she headed off to face Ebon, who had apparently made her so upset that she had simply walked out. I would’ve stayed with her, but Ebon’s glare told me otherwise, and I slipped out of the Academy. I sat myself between a tree and the Academy wall and stared at the blossoms in the tree.
“Hey!”
I turned my head in the direction of the familiar voice and smiled.
“‘Ello Dave,” I said to Dave as he sat beside me. “What are ya doin’ ’ere?”
“Trying to find you, of course,” Dave said, staring at me with a look that said ‘You’re stupid’. “Been a while. So Freya’s back, eh?”
I nodded. “Yes, and as usual disaster followed ‘er ta Alexandria an’ back.”
Dave frowned. “Now what?”
“Matthew died,” I told him.

Dave sighed. “It’s always something. Poor Matt. He was a cool kid. Crazy, but cool.”
I nodded, silent. Freya and her family never were able to get away from disasters.
“So, did you comfort her?” Dave asked.
“O’ course,” I replied, wondering why Dave would ask such a dumb question.
Dave grinned. “Ah, good. So there is hope in you two.”
“Eh?” I looked at Dave with a quizzical look.
Dave chuckled. “You know what I mean.”
“Fully. But ’ow many times do I ’ave ta tell ya that we’re just friends?” I asked.
Dave laughed. “Frat, you keep telling yourself that.”
I sighed. “Dave —”
“Fratley, I’ve been watching you and her. The whole city knows you’re constantly around each other. Freya treats you like far more than a friend. You return this behavior naturally, even if you don’t notice it. There’s a lot more of a friendship between you, Fratley! One of you have to admit to it eventually!” Dave explained, ending with a grin.
I sighed. “Dave, what would ya possibly know ’bout the situation?”
Dave’s eyes sparkled. “A lot.”
I couldn’t help but grin. “Oh yeah, when ya fell in love things really went well!”

Dave lowered his eyes and sighed. “That wasn’t nice, Fratley. It’s not my fault she —”
I frowned as I suddenly remembered why Dave’s love relationship had not gone well. I put a reassuring hand on his shoulder.
“Sorry,” I said quietly and with sincere apology. ‘I forgot.’
Dave nodded slightly. “I figured. You have the worst memory of the whole city.”
I frowned, and Dave grinned.
“I’m surprised you remember your own name!” Dave said.
I sighed. “Ye revenge.”
Dave smiled. “Yeah, but it still hurt.”
I nodded and sighed. Dave’s girlfriend had caught ill and died only a few days after she and Dave fell in love. Dave still hadn’t recovered, thinking he was to blame. I had completely forgotten.
“Anyway,” Dave said quietly. ‘You’re obviously in love. The whole city has figured it out. Hell, I wouldn’t be surprised if the King knows.’
“An’ Puck,” I muttered.
Dave laughed. “The Prince knows everything. That little brat is the master of gossip.”
Prince Puck was only four, yet he somehow still managed to spread gossip, and quickly. Perhaps it had to deal with the fact that his mother had died at

childbirth, and the King was so busy with kingly matters that he never noticed when Puck escaped.
“Puck probably spread it,” I said with a sigh. ‘Life can’ be private! I take it that Puck knows of — of Matthew?’
Dave frowned. “Most likely. Thankfully, Puck doesn’t spread that as bad gossip.”
I sighed with relief. “Thank God.”
“What are you guys doing?”
Dave and I jumped with surprise at the new voice. Freya stepped over Dave and forced herself between us.
“Jeez, Freya! Must you be in the middle?” Dave complained, moving aside.
“Yes!” Freya replied.
After much shifting, the three of us were at last comfortable.
“So, what were you talking about?” Freya asked.
“Ya seem way too cheerful ta ‘ave just finished talkin’ wit’ Ebon,” I said, desperate to change the subject.
“Rose was there,” Freya said cheerfully. ‘Now what were you talking about?’
“Love,” Dan said with a grin. I wanted to smack him.
Freya looked at him with surprise. She then looked at me with a grin.

“Seriously?” she asked.
“I hate ya, Dan,” I muttered, smacking myself in the forehead.
Freya laughed. “I know that’s a yes. So, what about love?”
“Who we love — or loved,” Dan continued, adding the last part with guilt.
“Oh,” Freya said. She then smirked and turned to me. ‘And who did you say?’
“Erm.” I said, blushing.
Freya laughed. “I think I know.”
At this point Dave and Freya fell into their own conversation, talking of the latest couples and gossip. I simply stared at the sky, embarrassed, and refused to become part of the conversation.

Dave walked with Freya and I once we left, but he quickly diverted his course when he noticed his mother glaring at him. Freya and I were alone once again. Freya sighed, staring at her hand.
“Didn’t mean to embarrass you,” she said.
I shrugged. “I guess I embarrass easy.”
“I don’t think so. I’d be embarrassed too,” Freya said. She then grinned. ‘But you’re so much fun to make fun of.’
“I figured,” I muttered. “Why are ya staring at ye hand?”

Freya sighed again. She lowered her hand and her head as well. She stared at the ground and stopped walking. I stopped walking, suddenly sensing something was horribly wrong.
“Freya?” I began.
“I know how Matthew died,” Freya choked out. ‘It was me.’
“What?”
“I had a heavy cart with me,” Freya choked. “Mom had allowed me to sell some stuff to make money while at the play. Well, I was talking with a girl about five years older than me, and I wasn’t watching the cart. It rolled away and — and crushed Matthew.”
I could only stare dumbfounded. Freya fell to her knees, holding her head tightly. It looked like she was trying to crush her skull. I knelt beside her, and noticed that she wasn’t crying. She was simply sitting in the middle of the street, clutching her head, and blaming herself for something that was an accident. An accident that had happened simply because everything was at the wrong place at the wrong time, and because Freya was the perfect spreader of bad luck.
“Freya,” I said, at last finding my voice. ‘It’s not ye fault.’
“Of course it is! I was the one with the God-damn

cart! I was the one who let it get away!" Freya screamed.
"Freya, ya didn' let it get away. It just did," I explained gently. "Ya didn' do anythin'. The cart simply got away, and Matthew was in the wrong place."
Freya looked up at me, biting her lip.
"I was supposed to be watching the cart," she hissed.
"Right. But everyone lets 'is or 'er guard down. Another person would've let the cart go astray if they were chattin'. I would've done it. Hell, my perfect mothe' would've done it!"
Freya giggled at the mention of Rose, which was exactly what I wanted.
"Freya, everyone makes mistakes. Everyone does something. And while the penalty of the mistake may be severe, it doesn't mean ya meant ta do it." I then smiled. "Now, if it was Arana that was with a cart —"
Freya laughed. "Arana's a bitch."
"No kidding. But I'm not done. It's not ye fault Matthew got hit. It's no one's fault. And if ya must blame someone, blame the Great Dragon."
Freya stared at the ground for a moment. She then suddenly turned toward the sky.
"CURSE YOU, GREAT DRAGON!" she screamed, shaking her fist at the clouds. Everyone immediately

stared.
“Freya, let’s just thank ’er that a priest wasn’t around,” I muttered.
Freya’s eyes widened and her hands immediately covered her mouth. She looked around frantically, and when she saw no religious figures around, sighed with relief.
“I really don’t want to listen to them right now,” Freya muttered. ‘I already know I’m doomed to Hell. They don’t need to tell me that.’
I shook my head. “You’re not going ta Hell, Freya.”
“Puh,” Freya said as a reply.
Suddenly Freya dragged me to my feet.
“We look pretty silly on the floor,” she muttered.
She didn’t start walking, though. Instead, Freya sighed, and looked up at me.
“Well, I guess I should get moving,” she whispered. “Thank you.”
Freya kissed me on the cheek, though it was a challenge for her since she couldn’t reach my cheek anymore. She then left, and I watched her go, wondering what I had done to receive gratitude.
I did eventually figure it out, though. And I smiled.
Perhaps we were more than just friends.

——— Bwaha, I love leaving readers to think ;)
So what did Fratley do to receive gratitude? It’s easy

if you think about it.

Sorry about the slow update, I’m boring myself to death with this story. I will speed it up, though, and then I won’t be bored. So stayed tuned as we go through another time tunnel! =D

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Chapter Ten

Chapter Ten
Love's True Form

I could scarcely believe it.
Three years had passed since I had been chosen to be a Dragon Warrior. Now, it was the night of the party that was held to celebrate becoming Dragon Warriors. The next day would bring the actual ceremony.
“Fratley! Would ya come back in ’ere?” Rose screamed, exasperated. “Jeez!”
I chuckled softly and reentered the house to find Rose staring at me. She sighed.
“Please tell me you’re going to put your ’air up!” she complained.
“No,” I replied.
“Augh! Each time I try to make ya look civilized ya end up going out looking even more like an ape! God!” Rose screamed.
I laughed. “’Ush, Mamá. I don’t look like an ape.”
“Ya can’t see yourself!” Rose replied.
“Papá ’as long ’air,” I pointed out. ‘Ya don’t worry ’bout ’im.’
“I can’t control ’im! Though sometimes I wish I

could.”
I laughed. “Relax, Mamá. I’ll be fine.”
I walked away, and heard a few curses coming from Rose’s mutter. I headed into my room and grabbed my coat.
“I’ll be goin’ now,” I told Rose.
“Just in that? Augh, ya look like a monster,” Rose spat.
I chuckled. “Oh well. I’ll see you soon.”
I gave Rose a quick kiss on the cheek and left the house, leaving her muttering. I strolled down the street, admiring the city at night. I easily found my way to the Academy. Freya was waiting for me.
She wasn’t wearing anything really fancy, but her clothes were clearly new. She wasn’t wearing a dress — she never would for her life. She was instead wearing pretty blue clothes, and I could see a flower in her hair. I smiled and walked over.
“Ya look nice,” I said.
“You don’t,” Freya replied with a grin. ‘Actually, I’m kidding. You look great!’
I chuckled. “Tryin’ ta convince m’ mothe’ of that is the trick.”
“Where are you parents, anyway?” Freya asked.
“Back a’ ’ome. They’ll come eventually.”
We entered the Academy to find it in a very festive and crowded mood. The light was low, and in the

center of the large room was a massive table with ten chairs. Tables were set up along the wall's edges, covered in food and drink. Everyone in the room was a Dragon Warrior, or a to-be Dragon Warrior. Freya looked around.

"Wow, lots of people!" She chirped, then suddenly darted off.

I tried to follow her, but soon Freya was lost in the crowd. I let out a sigh and walked over to one of the tables. I grabbed a piece of bread and began to eat it idly, watching everyone.

"Oh, brilliant. If you're not watching her, then I know she's getting herself hurt!"

I turned in the direction of the familiar voice, and found myself staring into Junes' eyes.

"Hello," I said through a mouthful of bread. 'What are you doing here?'

"I'm here to make sure anyone who gets drugged by drunk fools doesn't die," Junes replied. "Some to-be Dragon Warriors have made it a contest over the years to see who they can drug."

I swallowed my bread. "And you think Freya's a target?"

"She's perfect! Female, mischievous, never paying attention," Junes continued with a sigh. 'No wonder the King wanted me here. I think he knows that Freya's a perfect target.'

“Do you think Ebon —” I began, but Junes look of “affirmative” made me stop. “Ebon wouldn’t dare.”
“Sure he would.”
I sighed again, quickly finishing my bread. I then began my search for Freya. My search didn’t find her downstairs, so I headed upstairs to find it to look more like a bar party than anything else. A band was playing music. Bartenders were wandering around from table to table. A few people were dancing like drunken idiots.
I squeezed through a crowd, ignoring the snide remarks I received, and soon saw Freya. She was talking with someone. No, wait, she wasn’t talking. In fact, she looked a bit on the displeased side. I soon figured out why. The male she was talking with was flirting with her. I snorted, having expected something along that line in such a place. With a sigh, I headed back downstairs.
“Did you find her?” Junes asked.
I nodded. “She’s being kept busy.”
Junes clearly heard the disappointment in my voice. “What’s wrong?”
“Nothing,” I said immediately, and headed off to try and find some food.
Nothing was appealing. People were quickly annoyed when I pushed by them only to not take anything. I walked from table to table, staring at the

good-looking food but finding no appetite for it. At last I stopped wandering and instead headed into one of the secret rooms, sliding through the small opening and into the warm room. A large fire greeted me. I sat down on the couch and stared at the fire's flickering flames.

I heard someone descend the stairs. Someone walked toward the room. Soon, they entered, and I turned to look at them.

It was Freya.

"Hey," she said softly, sounding shy and almost nervous.

I rose to my feet. "'Ello."

Freya stared at the ground. Something seemed to be making her nervous. I walked over to her and lifted her chin.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Oh! Nothing," Freya said. 'Just.'

"Hmm?" I asked.

"Well." Freya took a deep breath. "I never told you before, but — ever since —"

Freya stopped there, staring at the ground sheepishly. I stared at her curiously.

"God, I sound stupid," Freya muttered. "But — But, oh God, Frat, I love you!"

I stared dumbfounded.

"Ever since we met I always felt something," Freya

continued, now staring at me. ‘I was always comfortable around you, ready to tell you anything. I always wanted to be around and I still do and — I sound really stupid, don’t I?’
“No,” I replied immediately.
“Well,” Freya said with a deep breath. “I always liked your company. It made me feel better just to know you were there. I’ve always loved you and I still love you but I’m afraid — afraid that you don’t love me back. That’s why I never told you. God, Fratley, do you?”
I knew what she meant. I knew what she was asking immediately. She stared at me with fear that perhaps her thought was true. If it was true, then I might as well kill myself because of my own stupidity. Of course I loved her! It took me three years to finally figure it out, but I loved her.
But my voice refused to work. I could tell without even trying to speak that nothing would come out. I was mute, with surprise and relief and happiness. But words weren’t the only way to express love, were they?
I stared at Freya, and suddenly she was the most beautiful thing on the whole planet. She stared in the return, the fire reflected in her green eyes. I walked over to her and carefully pulled her close. She stared at me with slight confusion and plenty of hope. She

didn’t know what I had in mind. I barely did either — until I did it.

I closed my eyes and kissed Freya gently on the lips. I felt her body tense with surprise, then relax. The kiss was long, but I eventually pulled away and opened my eyes. Her eyes were also closed, but they eventually opened and stared at me with surprise. I smiled.

“I sure hope you don’t need me to say anything,” I muttered softly.

Freya blinked. The look of surprise became one of great delight. She smiled, and the next thing I knew I was being choked to death by a hug.

Well, regardless that I couldn’t breathe, it was still nice, and Freya at least realized I couldn’t breathe and released me. She stared at me, all smiles.

“I guess I’m pretty foolish,” she muttered.

“I don’t think so,” I replied. ‘I think if ya had told me that before I would’ve fainted.’

Freya giggled. “I almost fainted when you kissed me.”

I smiled. “Really? Would like me ta do it again?”

Freya’s eyes sparkled, but it took her a few seconds to reply.

“Yes.”

It was very clear 30 minutes later when Freya and I emerged that Rose, who had arrived at some time before, knew exactly what had happened. She took one look at us and rolled her eyes. Aireff laughed, finding something absolutely hilarious. Freya blushed.

“Your parents know, don’t they?” she asked. ‘They are smart.’

“Not like we did anythin’,” I replied. “Otherwise Rose would be pissed.”

Freya giggled. “I don’t want to see her pissed.”

Rose rolled her eyes again and headed by us.

“Get some food before ya really look out of place,” she muttered to the two of us.

“Out of place?” Freya asked. “What’s so out —”

“Ignore ‘er,” Aireff said, leaning against a wall. “Remembe’ Ruben, Fratley?”

I grinned and nodded.

“Same thing, except on a much smaller scale,” he replied.

I laughed. “Oh yes, a much smaller scale indeed!”

“What?” Freya asked.

“Think Ruben, then think a pretty girl, and then you have what makes Rose really pissed,” I replied, rolling my eyes.

“Oh,” Freya replied. ‘I get it.’

I laughed. “Let’s get somethin’ to eat.”

Freya nodded agreement and we headed over to the tables. Everyone, it seemed, had disappeared to the bar. Junes had also clearly gone up there. Seeing him gone reminded me of the earlier conversation we had.
“Freya, ya didn’t ‘ave anythin’ ta drink, did ya?” I asked.
Freya shook her head.
“Good,” I replied.
Freya didn’t ask why. She was too busy trying to shove food in my mouth.
“Keep away from me!” I shouted teasingly. ‘I can feed myself, jeez!’
Freya laughed. “Sorry! I love your reaction!”
“Ya like to be aggravating,” I muttered, grabbing some food from Freya’s hand.
“Who said you can have that?”‘Ey, ya are tryin’ ta shove it in m’ mouth anyway. “” Good point. “Freya grabbed a bit of her own food and began to eat. The place was relatively quiet, except for the extreme noise coming from the bar. Aireff was humming while leaning against the wall near the secret room. Rose had disappeared, probably upstairs. A few other Dragon Warriors were in the room, but they looked like they could’ve been alive when Gaia first came to being.
Freya and I grabbed a little more food, then sat

down at the table. Freya spent a lot more time staring at me than eating, but I was eating and staring at the same time. Freya suddenly went into a giggling frenzy, and I rolled my eyes. Eventually she calmed down and began eating, but something about me had been hilarious to her.

The rest of the night was relatively quiet and peaceful, except for the panic that came when two Dragon Warriors were drugged. I probably never would've gotten involved if it weren't for the fact that Rose was drugged.

I first found out when I heard startled shouts and screams. I then heard two bodies fall. Aireff headed upstairs, and I soon heard him screaming angrily. I immediately headed upstairs to find Aireff knelt beside Rose, who wasn't moving.

I rushed over to Rose. Her eyes were half-closed and not focusing. Her breaths came out in irregular gasps. Her face was bruised. It looked as if someone had dragged her down.

I immediately looked around, and located Ebon hidden in a corner. My eyes narrowed, yet I bit my lip hard to keep my comments from coming out. Aireff was screaming enough.

"Keep your mouth shut," Ebon spat suddenly at Aireff. "She deserved it."

Aireff was about to retort when a white blur rushed by. Within seconds, Ebon was on the floor, Freya on top of him and smashing her fist into his eye.

Ebon kicked Freya off him, but Freya was just as quickly body— slamming him. Ebon rolled away, but Freya pursued him. Ebon leapt to his feet and kicked Freya in the stomach. Freya punched him in the jaw, then kicked him in the stomach. Ebon fell to his knees, and Freya punched him to the ground. Soon she was on top of him, beating him up.

Everyone could only stare. I could see the anger in Freya's eyes. She was angry at Ebon for drugging Rose, even though Rose wasn't even her mother.

Suddenly Ebon's feet kicked out. Freya slid backwards. Ebon rose to his feet and grabbed Freya by the throat. He slammed her against the wall. Freya kicked him in the stomach, causing him to wince.

I ran forward, but Ebon had already thrown Freya toward the back wall. She slammed into a cabinet full of glass. Glass shattered while she fell to the ground, and the cabinet wobbled. It began to fall, and a few people stepped forward.

I barely noticed what I was doing. I rushed forward, but it fell like slow motion. I grabbed Freya and made a crazy jump away from the cabinet and to the ground. Behind me, the cabinet hit the ground.

Freya and I lied on the ground for a while, gasping. Freya then made a wild leap for Ebon. I grabbed her and pulled her back.
“Let me get at him!” Freya screamed.
“Freya, calm down!” I said, pulling her close. “Take a good look. Ya ’urt ’im. Damn, did ya ’urt ’im!”
It couldn’t be truer. Ebon’s mouth was bleeding, while a black eye had formed. He looked as if he just got ran over by an airship. He glared at Aireff, as if expecting Aireff to do something. Aireff had Rose in his arms, but he didn’t say anything to me. He only smirked.
“Serves ya God-Damn right, Ebon,” Aireff spat.
Everyone muttered agreement. Ebon looked enraged. He looked over at Freya angrily and I held up my fist.
“Touch ’er,” I said warningly. ‘And I’ll beat the shit out of ya.’
“Beat ’im up, anyway,” Aireff said, winking.
Ebon looked dumbfounded and extremely shocked. He hadn’t expected the entire room to go against him. He left the room quickly.
“Come on, Frat, let’s go,” Aireff said, shifting his arms. “And bring Freya.”
I nodded, releasing Freya. We followed Aireff down the stairs.
“Ya aren’t mad at me o’ Freya?” I asked.

Aireff looked over at me and grinned.
“I’m just mad ya didn’ kill ’im,” Aireff told Freya and me.
We all laughed.

——————— Ah, yes, I stink at romance, yet exceed in action and violence, and I think this chapter did a good job proving it. Sorry about the slight crappiness. Anyway, Freya and Fratley finally realize their love for each other, yay! =) As for any other comments. I have none =D

I am now going to be an idiot and advertise my own story, “Bidding Goodnight”. It relates to this story so you may want to take a look. =)

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Chapter Eleven

Chapter Eleven
The Mark of a Dragon

"If ya aren't ready in five minutes ya are going to be late, God-Damn it!"
I glanced over at Rose, who was still in a bad mood after being drugged the other night. I wasn't concerned about being late to the ceremony. After all, the other boys would come even later. Still, just to keep her from screaming, I quickened my pace and was ready in two minutes. The outfit for the ceremony was simple, and for good reason. I wore no shirt at that moment, though I had stuffed a simple white one into my bag while Rose wasn't looking. My pants were leather and reached down to my ankles. And, just to please my mother, I had put my long dirty blonde hair back in a small ponytail. Strangely enough, my hair changed colors yearly. Last year it was dark brown. Now it was reverting back to blonde. I wished it would make up its mind, and I really wished I knew which parent to blame.
"All right, all right, I'm ready," I shouted, swinging my bag over my shoulder and heading out of the room. 'Please tell me it's warm.'

“Swelterin’,” Aireff replied. He had actually dressed in a semi— formal outfit, and his hair was actually smooth and neat. It must’ve taken a lot of convincing from Rose to achieve it.

Ruben rushed into the room. He was the only man in the house who actually looked halfway decent. Only Rose could beat him out, with her pretty sleeveless lavender dress that revealed two scars on her shoulders that met a third vertical scar under her neck. Her long blonde hair was set up in two braids, with a third tiny braid passing over her face. I thought she looked gorgeous, but you don’t tell Rose that.

“Finally,” Rose muttered. ‘Are we in order?’

“We never are,” Aireff replied with a laugh.

With that, we headed outside. I looked around immediately for Freya, but she wasn’t around. She was probably too busy trying to convince her mother to come to the ceremony.

I was wrong. When we reached the castle grounds, I was surprised to see Arana reading a book. She wore a simple turquoise dress that matched her eyes, and there was a blue flower in her hair. She looked nice, except perhaps for the fact that she glared evilly at me as I passed. I stuck my tongue out at her, and that was our greeting.

I at last found Freya. She wore a teal sleeveless

dress, and was chatting with Puck. Well, actually, they weren't chatting. Puck was trying to pull Freya's hair, and Freya was talking in an attempt to get him off.
"'Ey Freya!" I shouted.
"Hang on. Puck, get off!" Freya screamed, finally wrenching Puck off her hair. She shoved him into the King's maid's arms. "Finally!"
Freya rose to her feet and walked over to me.
"I hate Puck," she said.
I laughed. "I don' blame ya."
"You look nice. Well, for you anyway," Freya told me, grinning. 'You can never get dressed up, can you?'
"Nope," I replied. "Don' see the point."
"So people like you and will talk to you, of course!"
"Heh. When are we startin'?"
"In a few minutes. So soon I'll have to be serious."
"I don't like it when you're serious."
"We've all changed."
"Aye."
A gong sounded, causing my ears to ring. Everyone rose to their feet and looked in the direction of the sound. I noticed Arana drop her book and salute.
Ah, now I understood. I padded over to the other contestants. Freya quickly followed. Everyone quickly lined up, while Puck suddenly found it

appropriate to start shouting nonsense. Everyone groaned, and a few covered their ears. I just hoped the site of his father would shut Puck up.

Soon, the door of the castle opened, and the King of Burmecia stepped out. Puck shut up at the site of his father, and instead began clapping until the maid finally got extremely sick of him and slapped his hands. The King ignored his highly annoying son and instead walked out and past everyone, receiving bows and salutes. He soon reached the hedges that separated the actual castle grounds from the path leading to them. He turned to stare at us all, his purple cloak blowing softly in the breeze.

“Welcome,” the King said, and his voice traveled on the wind and through out the grounds. “to a ceremony of great importance. Three years ago young lads and ladies were chosen to enter through the door of the Dragon Academy to learn the hardest of subjects. Today, they will be honored due to success in an Academy. Today, people of Burmecia, we will honor the newest Dragon Warriors!”

The crowd burst into cheers. Even Arana was clapping, though she looked highly bored. Puck laughed gleefully and began clapping maniacally. Ebon squeezed his way through the crowd. It was clear that Junes had taken a good look at him, but even clearer that Junes had done little. He walked

over to the King, and they exchanged bows. He then took his place beside the King without another word. The crowd slowly fell silent, and the King took a deep breath.

“We shall now call the new Dragon Warriors. If they accept the oath, then I acknowledge their skill,” the King said as he took out a machete.

I stared at the machete curiously while the first contestant was called up. Everyone was silent except for the King, but I couldn’t hear anything. I was lost in my own thoughts. I put my bag down, figuring it wouldn’t be right to have it when I was called.

Minutes passed with me still not paying attention.

“Fratley.”

The King spoke my name, and automatically I walked over. Though I had been paying no attention, I knew to fall onto one knee, and bowed my head, staring at the ground. I felt the machete on my shoulder.

“You have been given the chance to protect one of the most ancient cities that still stand: Burmecia. Will you promise to be honest in all regards? Will you swear to not make a difference between friend and foe, and regard them as equals in dangerous situations? Will you swear to be serious in all matters, regardless of the situation? Will you swear to put the innocent before your life? Will you swear

to protect Burmecia with your life? Will you swear never to neglect your duties? Will you swear it all?"
A brief silence followed the end of the King's speech. I took a deep breath.
"I swear it."
My words rang through the area despite their direction toward the ground. The machete left my shoulder.
"Then, I dub you Sir Fratley of Burmecia!" The King shouted.
It happened so quickly that I didn't feel it. The machete slashed my shoulders lightly, making to diagonal cuts that would eventually meet if longer. Another smaller vertical slash was made just below my neck. It was made to look like a dragon. It was the mark of a Dragon Warrior.
The crowd erupted into cheers. I rose to my feet and bowed. The King smiled. I walked away, and suddenly was being squeezed to death by my mother, which was pretty mortifying. She finally released me, and I saw that her eyes were full of tears.
"I'm proud," Rose muttered, smiling. 'I'm so proud of you.'
"Let go of 'im, ya are embarrassing 'im," Aireff said, smiling.
Rose instead hugged me again. I sighed with

annoyance. She released me and walked back over to Aireff. I followed. The crowd was silent again, and it took me a few minutes to realize that the King was reciting his speech to Freya. We all listened intently. I stared at Freya, who was kneeling on the ground, staring at the ground. Her eyes looked shinier than usual, and I soon realized that tears brimmed in her eyes. When the King fell silent, Freya took a shaky breath.

“I swear it,” Freya managed to say, and I realized she was nervous.

“Then I dub you Lady Freya of Burmecia!” the King shouted, and soon Freya had the same mark as the rest of the Dragon Warriors.

The crowd began their normal loud cheering. Freya rose to her feet. She immediately looked over at me. I smiled warmly and she rushed forward. I met her rush and pushed her close to me in a tight embrace. I kissed her on the forehead.

“Holy crap, how’d I make it?” Freya whispered.

“You’re Freya. Naturally ya made it,” I whispered back.

“Huh,” Freya muttered.

I released Freya and she backed up. The King had finished speaking and returned to the castle. Ebon had quickly followed, and the crowd was slowly making its way into the castle. I grabbed my bag,

then followed Rose and Aireff into the castle. Inside, the castle was beautiful with fancy decorations. There was plenty of room to spread out, and the crowd had indeed spread to take the entire room. The King was sitting in his throne, talking in a low voice with Ebon. Drinks had been set up near a closed door, and Junes was standing nearby these drinks. A good portion of the crowd was grouping near the drinks.

“Do you see Arana?” Freya asked.

“No,” I replied.

“Good,” Freya replied. ‘I don’t want her asinine ways ruining the party.’

“At least ye mothe’ wasn’ huggin’ ya ta death,” I muttered.

“I don’t even know where my mother is,” Freya replied.

“She’s talkin’ wit the King.”

“Oh joy. Want to get a drink?”

“Sure.”

We walked over to the drink table, squeezing our way through to see the drinks. We took some wine and headed away from the table.

“I’ve never had this stuff,” Freya said.

“I ‘ave, though m’ parents don’ exactly know,” I replied with a soft chuckle.

Freya took a sip of the wine.

“Not bad,” she said.
I drank all the wine in one sitting, startling Freya.
“Jeez, you didn’t let that go to waste,” she commented.
“Never,” I replied with a smile.
Freya tried to do the same thing, but ended up spitting half the wine out.
“It’s too strong! How do you do it?” she asked.
I shrugged. Freya finished the rest of the wine and looked around the room.
“Everyone seems so happy,” she commented.
I nodded agreement. “Indeed.”
“I wonder if they’ll serve food.”
“Maybe.”
“Are you going to say much else?”
I smiled. “Like what?”
“Oh, I don’t know — Hey, look, that door’s open!”
I looked over at a door in the east wall to discover that it was open. Apparently it was okay to explore that way. Freya and I glanced at each other. We then headed through the doorway. We were in a small room with a fire roaring in a fireplace. This was dull for us and we headed through another doorway to find ourselves in a bedroom. Freya walked over to the bed and sat on it, feeling the top blanket’s fabric.
“It’s soft!” she commented.
“Of course it is, it belongs ta the King,” I said with a

laugh. I then shivered. “Cold in ’ere.”
While I ripped open my bag and put on my shirt, Freya grabbed the pillow on the bed and examined it.
“Fratley, what is this?”
I walked over and sat beside Freya. I examined the odd patterns on the pillow.
“I don’ know,” I replied.
“Curious,” Freya muttered. ‘Almost looks like a — an eidolon?’
“An eidolon? But which one?” I asked.
“I don’t know,” Freya replied, tossing the pillow back to its original place. “But that’s the impression I got.”
There was a brief silence. Freya fell backwards and onto her back.
“The King has such luxury, and some people can’t even afford a half— way decent home,” she muttered.
I also fell backwards and onto my back. “It’s always like that.”
“But why? Why can’t the royalty share their wealth?” Freya asked. ‘I don’t understand it. Why can’t they share?’
I began to play with Freya’s hair. “I don’ know. But some royalty does try.”
“Some,” Freya said. ‘The King does try, but there

are still those homeless. I wonder how they get food?'
"Scavengin'."
"If only someone could provide them with food. I don't know, Frat. We just promised this big oath, and the royalty barely do half of it."
I nodded agreement. "Yeah, well maybe when ya are rich an' famous ya won' want to give away ye money."
Freya chuckled. "Like I'm ever going to be rich or famous."
"Ya never know what the future may 'old."
"True." Freya trailed off as her eyes met mine. 'You're so cute.'
"Stop that. I'm supposed ta be callin' ya cute."
"Well, you're too late."
"Ya do realize that we're in the middle of a royal room lying on a bed, and that someone could barge in at any time?"
"Yes. And I don't give a shit."
"And ya do know the first thought ta cross their mind, right?"
"Yes. And —"
"Ya don' give a shit."
"Exactly."
I rolled my eyes with disbelief. Freya smirked, staring at me. The castle seemed quiet, as the stone

walls blocked out any noise.
“I don’t think anyone’s going to barge in,” Freya said quietly.
“An’ why would they not?” I asked, still playing with Freya’s hair.
“Because the wine and beer is out there, not in here,” Freya commented.
I laughed. “Good point.”
“Speaking of wine, I still have this stupid glass,” Freya commented, holding up her wineglass. She put it aside. ‘Ah well.’
“Don’ forget that when we leave,” I reminded her.
“I know.” Freya looked up at the ceiling. ‘Darn. Castles ceilings are just as dull as regular ones!’
I laughed and kissed Freya on the cheek. “Are ya surprised?”
“Yes,” Freya said. ‘You’d think they’d decorate the ceiling too.’
“Why would they bothe’? And may I ask why you trailed off?”
“Oh, well, I just want you to kiss me again.”
“Of course. All right, ya silly girl, I’ll obey.”
And indeed, I did obey.

“Ya always find some way to make me give in,” I told Freya as I lied on the floor ten minutes later, watching her.

“Make you give in to what?” Freya asked. She was lying on the bed on her stomach, smiling contently.
“Well, I’m always tryin’ to keep serious and sane, but the next thing I know I’m kissin’ ya. What spell have ya cast on me, woman?” I asked.
“The spell of love,” Freya replied. ‘And remember, it’s only been around for 24 hours.’
“Feels like 24 years.”
“Frat, we haven’t been alive for 24 years.”
“Oh yeah.”
Freya laughed. “You ditz.”
“Ditz? Freya, I’m a dimwit, not a ditz.”
“You’re neither.”
“But ya just —”
“Oh, I know, but I was kidding,” Freya said. She slid onto the floor, watching me. ‘Wonder if they brought out food.’
“Most likely,” I commented, rising to a sitting position. “Why? Ya hungry?”
“No. I want to stay right here, alone with you.”
“Aww, ’ow sweet,” I said, smiling. ‘I’m surprised ya can stay sane for this long wit me.’
“You took away my sanity long ago, Frat,” Freya replied.
“Oh my. We must find it!”
“I don’t know where you left it,” Freya said, lying down.

“Stop that.”
Freya smiled. “I think you placed it in your heart.”
“Oh please,” I said, smiling in return. ‘Stop temptin’ me, ya torturer!’
“Torturer? I like ‘tormenter’ better. Sounds more professional.”
“I’m not a professional, so there.”
“I’ve noticed. You have the intelligence of mud.”
“Thanks,” I said downheartedly.
Freya laughed, rose to a sitting position, and kissed me. “Oh hush. I’m kidding! Come on. Let’s get up off the floor and back into the main hall before Rose notices we’re missing.”
“Good plan. I like that one,” I commented, rising to my feet. “An’ don’ forget the stupid glass!”

“Where were ya two?” Rose asked when Freya and I returned to the main hall. ‘The food was brought out five minutes ago!’
“Explorin’ the castle,” I replied.
“Yeah right,” Rose muttered, but she didn’t ask any more questions.
Aireff laughed. “Leave them alone, Rose, or I’ll tell them ’bout us.”
“Shit, don’t ya dare!” Rose snarled.
Rolling my eyes, I slipped past my parents, Freya following. We each grabbed a plate, piled it with

food, and sat down at the table. The King glanced at us briefly, but said nothing. We began to eat, and I noted that Rose and Aireff had disappeared.
“Notice someone missin’?” I asked Freya.
Freya looked around, then grinned. “Your parents.”
“‘Ow ’bout we tease them late’?” I asked.
Freya’s grin became wicked. “Sure.”
We both snickered, then resumed eating.

I love how parents will scold you for doing something, then do the same thing. But the thing is, with me as a son, and Freya as my girlfriend, you never get away with it. Ever. And one thing is for sure.
The day of the ceremony was definitely an extremely entertaining day.

———————— I couldn’t think of a good ending for this chapter. Oh well. Anyway, so Freya and Fratley are finally Dragon Warriors! We’re going to skip about a year or so ahead for the next chapter, and you may just know what comes next. Stay tuned!

Updates may become slower since my parents are going to let me get rats! Yay! =) But that means I need to read about care, cages, etc. before I actually get them. And then there is the actual buying! So if

updates are slow, it’s because I’m getting ready to buy rats!

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Chapter Twelve

Chapter Twelve
To Leave Home

When you are a Dragon Warrior, you find out things you that didn't want to know, or refused to realize.

The King put high trust in me. I believe he may have put the most trust in me. He sent me on some of the more "dangerous" missions. I would often be sent for guard duty (which was far more boring than dangerous), and three different times was sent outside Burmecia to one of the other kingdoms for treaties. Most of the visits went well, but another — the one to Alexandria — was different.

I could see the strain in Queen Brahne's face, and sense her uneasiness. Something about her wasn't right. Then there was Beatrix. I didn't like her from the start. She seemed cold, with no mercy, and always spoke in low voices. When I headed off, I stayed around hidden behind the corner, and Beatrix continued to speak in a low voice. As I left Alexandria, I heard stories.

I didn't like what I heard. It stayed with me.

Two years later, I still remembered. I knew that dangers outside of Burmecia might just turn their heads in the direction of us. But I felt I should do something about it. No one else clearly would.
But first I had to tell my parents.
I woke up one morning in July with that as my goal. I slowly got out of bed and entered the kitchen to find Aireff and Rose awake. This was most likely a miracle in itself. They were rarely up at the same time.
“’Ello, Fratley,” Aireff said with a smile.
“’Ello,” I replied, sitting down at the table, but I could hear the strain in my own voice.
“What’s wrong?” Rose asked, detecting the strain in my voice.
I sighed. “Well.”
“What?” Rose asked, and now she looked worried.
“I’m going to leave Burmecia,” I said quickly.
“What?!” Rose screamed, leaping out of her chair with shock.
“I’m going to leave,” I repeated.
“You have to be kidding. You can’t be serious!” Rose screamed angrily at me.
“Does the King know?” Aireff asked, his voice calm.
“Yes,” I admitted. ‘And he says its okay.’
“What?! Holy shit, no way!” Rose screamed angrily,

tears gathering in her eyes. “How dare he! You’re my son, God damn it! How dare he say it’s okay when you’re my son!”
“Rose—” Aireff began, but he was a bit late.
“I say what goes! How can the King say it’s okay! God damn that asshole! You’re my son and I’m going to go tell that to him to his face!” Rose screamed.
At this point Rose stormed down the stairs and out of the house. Aireff sighed, shaking his head.
“Over-reacting, thy name is Rose,” he said quietly.
I nodded slightly in agreement.

Aireff didn’t seem all that upset. He didn’t seem pleased with my decision, but he didn’t say anything he against it. He seemed to understand that I was going to leave no matter what.
Rose, on the other hand, had freaked out. And she hadn’t returned ten minutes later. Aireff paced nervously, something troubling him. I lied on my bed, tracing designs on my pillow. Soon, however, I heard the door open. I expected it to slam, but instead it closed quietly. I slowly slid off the bed and into the kitchen. Rose had made it to the top of the stairs. Her head was hung, but I could still see the tears in her eyes.
“Mamá?” I asked.

Rose shook her head, her shoulders shaking.
“It’s not fair,” she muttered softly.
Rose rushed from the room and into her room. Aireff watched her with worry. He then swiftly followed. I quietly followed and stopped outside the doorway, kneeling down beside it. I could hear Rose sobbing.
“Rose, what is wrong?” Aireff asked gently.
“I-I talked with the King,” Rose sobbed. ‘I told him m-my opinion. A— And he said.’
“What?” Aireff asked. “Rose, what is wrong?”
“The king said. He said that I can’t control him,” Rose choked out.
“What?”
“He said that Fratley can make his decisions,” Rose sobbed. “He said — He said he is an adult and that I — I can’t say anything to stop him!”

“You’re kidding,” Aireff muttered. ‘You mean he’s-?’
“Yes! Yes, he’s considered an adult!” Rose choked out.
I stood still, brow furrowed with confusion. Adult? I was only sixteen. How could I be an adult?
Suddenly Rose rushed out of the room. She looked down at me.
“You heard, didn’t you?” she asked.

“What does it mean?” I asked.
“It means — it means that you can do whatever you God-damn want! You can get married, get drunk, get in a fight, whatever! I can’t do anything against your actions! It’s — it’s as if you’re not even my son!” Rose screamed.
I only stared with shock. Rose stared at me with brokenhearted despair, then rushed back into her room and slammed the door.
I had won. I slowly realized that I had won the battle. But I felt no satisfaction. I could leave, yes, but I felt no satisfaction on winning the battle and defeating my parents. I only felt remorse.
With a sigh, I left the house, heading for Freya’s.

As usual, I didn’t bother knocking when I got to Freya’s house. I’m simply stepped right in. I ignored Arana, who took one look at my face and chose to leave me alone, and I simply headed toward Freya’s room. I swiftly walked up the stairs and, seeing the door to Freya’s room open, entered.
Freya, who had been reading a book on her bed, immediately looked up when she heard me enter. She smiled, but soon saw my face.
“What’s wrong?” she asked.
I sighed and sat down on Arana’s bed. Freya shut the book and sat next to me.

“I’ve — I’ve decided to leave Burmecia,” I announced.
“You’re kidding,” Freya muttered.
“No, I’m not,” I replied.
“But why? Why are you leaving?” Freya asked.
“Burmecia is in danger. I leave to protect it,” I replied, feeling stupid as I said it.
“But — But why? Why leave to protect Burmecia when you won’t be there? Fratley, is there another reason? A reason you’re — not — telling me?”
I looked up, hearing the soft break in Freya’s voice. Her eyes were full of tears, and tears were slowly sliding down her cheeks. She was making a desperate attempt not to break into sobs.
“Freya, it’s not you,” I said gently.
“What is it, then?” Freya asked.
“No one here. It’s outside. Burmecia is in danger. I can sense it. I must go,” I began to explain, but Freya was quick to cut me off.
“Go? When you think there is danger! Frat, it makes far more sense to stay here and fight it off with the rest of us!” Freya declared.
I lowered my gaze.
“No. I have to find it, Freya. I cannot wait for it to come. Something tells me that it will annihilate us here,” I replied softly.
“Can’t I come with you, then?” Freya asked.

I took a deep breath, then let it out slowly. I wanted Freya to come, but my mind told me that it was too dangerous.
“I’m sorry, Freya, but no. It’s too dangerous,” I replied sadly.
There was a brief paused before Freya exploded.
“Too dangerous? Fratley, I’m older than you are! I should know about danger, God-damn it! And you’re trying to tell me it’s too dangerous!” Freya screamed. Tears were forming in her eyes once more. ‘Why won’t you tell me anything? Why won’t you let me come with you? What is something I did? Something someone else did? Fratley, what the hell is going on?’
“I already told you. Everything I said was the truth,” I muttered.
Freya stared at me with shock. She then sighed.
“All right. Then when are you leaving?” she asked quietly.
I swallowed hoarsely. I knew when I was leaving. But telling Freya was the trick. Over a year Dragon Warrior duties had calmed her. But she still easily exploded.
“Two weeks,” I muttered.
“Two weeks?” Freya repeated. “Damn it!”
Freya plowed her fist into my shoulder. It hurt, but I soon figured out that she had done it because she

had nothing else to punch. Laying her head against my shoulder, Freya began to sob.
“Two weeks? That’s it? Why not two months?” Freya asked between sobs.
“The enemies may come in two months,” I replied gently, rubbing Freya’s shoulders.
“Then you might as well leave tomorrow!” Freya choked out. “The enemies could come in two weeks!”

“I need to get ready,” I replied.
“That’s it! You need to get ready? Doesn’t matter that you have friends and family to say goodbye to? Fratley, what’s the matter with you?” Freya asked, pulling herself away and staring at me. “What the hell is the matter? You seem so eager to just get out of here!”

“I don’t want to leave!” I replied defensively.
“Then why don’t you prove it?” Freya screamed.
Before I could even begin to prove anything, however, Freya, still in tears, had stormed out of the room.

Late at night, I sat at the lake, throwing in pebbles. Rose had given an extremely similar reaction when she heard I was leaving, except she had been hysterical enough before that, so she was

worse. Aireff had still showed no emotion, and I didn't know where Freya was. I sighed sadly, tossing another pebble into the lake. I watched it skid across the surface before it finally sank.
"You're using the wrong wrist movement."
I looked over at my left to find Freya sitting next to me. I had been so distracted I hadn't heard her come.
"What are you doing here?" I asked.
"I was looking for you," Freya muttered, leaning against me. 'I'm sorry I stormed out.'
"It's not your fault. I upset you," I replied, putting my arm around her shoulders.
"Are you sure you want to leave?" Freya asked downheartedly.
"Yes," I replied quietly.
Freya sighed. "I know it's hopeless but — Can't you stay? Can't I at least go with you?"

I shook my head. Freya sighed once more.
"Fratley, why? What if I never see you again?" Freya asked.
"I'll come back. It's not like I'm never returning," I told her. 'Freya, we have two weeks.'
"When we could've had years," Freya muttered. "Fratley, I guess there is nothing I can do to change your mind?"
"Nothing," I replied.

Freya looked up at me. “Then can we at least have this night?”

I looked over at her and kissed her.
“Of course,” I whispered quietly.

The next two weeks ended up being extremely depressing. Rose seemed as if she’d never be happy again, though she tried desperately to seem happy. Aireff also seemed low-spirited, though he tried to help me. Ruben seemed upset, but he was training to be a soldier and we barely saw each other anyway. When I wasn’t “preparing”, I was with Freya. I couldn’t help it. She seemed like the only one who would try to be happy, though her smiles were strained when they actually came. She also was with me when I was preparing, and I used her good advice when picking out items. But when the last two days came, I didn’t see anyone. I couldn’t. I knew I’d probably break down and give in to their begs.

The day came. I barely felt awake on the day I would leave. I got together my stuff and put on the clothes I chose to travel in. Rose had, thankfully, chosen not to burst out sobbing when I bided her and Aireff goodbye. She instead wished me good luck, which was pretty startling.

And, as I expected, Freya was waiting for me.
“So you are going to do it,” she said quietly.
I nodded.
“Before you go, I have a question,” Freya told me.
“Go ahead,” I replied.
“What are some of the enemies you fear?” Freya asked.
I stared at the ground, spinning my spear idly. I then looked back up at her.
“Beatrix,” I said simply.
“Beatrix?” Freya repeated with confusion.
I nodded. “Yes, Beatrix. I hear — and I have seen — that there are many fierce warriors out in the world — some more powerful than I. Beatrix in particular. They say her swordmanship is the best in the land — And it looked like it.”
“Fratley, do you insist on going on your journey?” Freya asked.
She had asked that question so many times that I had come up with an automatic answer.
“Yes… Please understand, Freya. Right now, Burmecia is at peace, while other nations are slowly but surely gaining power. I don’t know if my spear alone is enough to protect Burmecia……which is precisely why I must go out into the world,” I replied automatically.

Freya sighed. “Fratley, don’t you see? I don’t think I can live on my own — not without you.”

“Freya, you’re going to be fine,” I replied, remembering that we had had this conversation about fifty times. ‘Trust your strength… and have faith in your destiny. Once I complete my journey around the world, I will return to Burmecia.’ Freya lowered her eyes to the ground. “Then promise me, one more time, that you will return.”

“I promise.”

Now here came the hard part. I turned away, considering the conversation ended. As I began to walk away, feeling stiff, I heard Freya collapse. I then heard something that nearly made me turn around. Freya was crying. I could hear her sobbing. I almost stopped walking, but my mind told me that I couldn’t stop now, no matter what. Yet if I kept walking, I would stop eventually.

I broke into a run. I dashed by everyone until I had passed through the gates. I then slammed myself against the walls protecting Burmecia. I panted, watching the gray sky.

I had left. I was supposed to be gone now. My feet, however, seemed ready to lead me back in. I

sighed, swallowed and forced myself to look ahead. I could see a massive sandstorm in the distance, yet I knew that beyond that sandstorm was a tree — Cleyra.

Why not go there?

I took a deep breath and wiped at the tears in my eyes. I then began to walk slowly forward. Slowly my pace increased, until I was walking briskly. I looked around, examining the area for monsters, but I didn't really care if any came along. I sighed again. The rain felt more miserable than usual. Everything seemed miserable.

You can do this, I told myself. Why shouldn't you?

To other people, I'm sure I looked confident and completely aware of what I as doing. Yet if they came closer, they would no doubt see the tears in my eyes.

———— So Fratley has left Burmecia. I tried to stay true to the flashback included in the game, though it was hard since I don't think Freya would exactly be calling him "Sir". I did add a thing or two to their words, but it's pretty much the same. I have

no comment with this chapter, I’m afraid. It just seems bad to me. :\

Well, I’m slowly saving up the money I need to buy cute little ratties! And no, I’m not going to evolve them into Burmecians =D (I was chuckling when I read that) I plan on getting three females. And take a wild guess at what I’ll name one of them ;)

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Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Thirteen
The Tree within the Storm

Cleyra. I had been there once to make an attempt to set up a trading route. The people of Cleyra didn't like what we had to trade, and personally, I hadn't liked what they had either.

Cleyra was a small village located in the top-most branches of a massive tree. You couldn't miss this tree, not because it was huge, but because a massive sandstorm surrounded it. Only the daring or stupid tried to get through the sandstorm, and only the lucky made it through. I was both daring and stupid, but lucky — That's a different story.

The first time I had gone to Cleyra, I had been expected, and a Cleyran had guided me. This time, however, there was no guide. I stared at the sandstorm from a distance, sitting on a lost log in the middle of the hot Vube Desert. Mist hung heavy in the air, only helping to make me even hotter. Some sand passed on the winds, but the winds were rare. I had about a mile before the winds would pick up and blow sand into my eyes.

I took my waterskin and took a deep drink, my

throat parched from me having tried to save the water. I would not be able to take another drink until I got through the sandstorm, unless I wanted the heavy winds to either toss the waterskin away from me, or to get sand in the water itself. The drink was satisfying, however, and as I put the waterskin away I felt that I could survive another two hours or so without a drink. I took out a bit of bread, which was beginning to show signs of turning into mold and not food. Knowing it was a lot better than nothing at all, I ate the bread quickly and rose to my feet. I made sure my pack was closed tightly, not wanting any sand to get into it and ruin the already-bad food. Then, taking my spear into my left hand as a threat to nearby monsters, I headed toward the mass sandstorm.

Within 30 minutes the wind began to slowly pick up. Sand was beginning to be picked up far more often. I didn’t bother with my hair now, knowing that there was now going to be more than enough of sand in it; besides, the wind kept it easily out of my face. I was walking straight into the wind. The sand stung my eyes, and I at last closed them, deciding that if any monsters lived here, they were far too busy trying to live to even be concerned with me. This proved to be true, for as I wandered blindly forward, any scurrying I heard did not result in an attack.

The wind became extremely fierce, and it felt as if the sand was being plastered to my face. My walk slowed, as the wind seemed to try to pull me back. Quickly I understood what I would need to do.

I opened my eyes and quickly lifted my hand to shield my eyes from the sand. I took my pack and carefully stuck my hand in it. When my hand touched paper, I pulled the paper out, quickly shutting the pack in the process. I checked to make sure I had grabbed the right scroll. Written on the ribbon that was tying the scroll shut was a single word: Haste.

It was the right one. I carefully took the ribbon off and allowed the wind to take it away. I then opened the scroll carefully. The wind tried to take it away as well, but I held it tight. Shielding my mouth and eyes with my hand, I shouted the ancient words on the scroll.

The minute the last word left my lips I felt sudden energy shoot through me. A golden haze seemed in front of my eyes, and I couldn’t help but smile in triumph as the golden haze flickered and the scroll turned to ash. The scroll had done its job.

I raced forward, and everything became a blur. I was at least three times faster than normal. The Haste spell was working perfectly. I prayed it would last a good while. Swiftly I streaked across the desert, the

wind parting as if it had been cut in half. The sand no longer blew into me, though once in a while some sand would come. The base of the tree of Cleyra came into view, but it was a few miles away. I ran faster, making the Haste spell work harder, as I watched the base of the trunk come closer and closer.

The tree came upon me so quickly I didn't have time to break. I dug my claws into the sand, only to find I skidded and slammed straight into the strong bark of the base of the tree. The Haste spell tried to comeback this abrupt stop, and the sinewy bark of the tree snapped. I toppled inside, along with the bark, slamming headfirst into the sandy ground, then rolling into a sitting position. I sat in such a position for a few seconds, dazed. My head was pounding.

Okay. Six times 23 is 138, I made myself recite in my mind. I then smiled with relief. Good. So I hadn't killed my memory yet.

Rose had been fearful that I would someday do something that would make me forget everything. Then again, she seemed to think that Ruben and Aireff may have the same thing result, but that didn't stop me from wondering if I would someday cause myself to forget everything.

I gave myself a shake, and it felt as if my entire mind rattled. I rose shakily to my feet, only to find

sheer pain came to my left ankle. I yelped and slid into the sand.

“Brilliant, now what did I do?” I asked myself. I stared down at my leg, only to find that nothing was wrong with it. It was my ankle that was swelling. I sighed. I certainly wasn’t going to defeat anything at this rate.

I rose shakily to my feet and looked around. The storm was behind me, but the winds within the tree were still pretty harsh. Sand seemed to be implanted in the ground, except in the spots where I could see it sinking into dangerous whirlpools of sand. There seemed to be a path to follow, but the only thing that could confirm such an idea was the fact that the sand was hard and packed. I limped forward, sniffing the air. The air smelled musty, yet the faint smell of Cleyran still hung in the air. Deciding that I was going in the right direction, I began to limp more quickly.

After some time, the pain in my ankle became tolerable, and I was no longer limping. My pace increased, as my mind was slowly remembering the trail that I must follow. I was still getting a bit lost, but slowly I was getting less lost and more towards my location: Cleyra itself.

The path was straightforward, except for the sand whirlpools that would pop out of no where. From

there, careful maneuvering would bring you past them. Then there was a point where you couldn't maneuver past them. Three whirlpools lay right near each other, and I soon found that I would have to jump. I looked down at my ankle. The swelling had ceased, but had not died down. I would most likely fall in.

Yet nothing stopped me, no matter how foolish. I knelt down slightly, then launched myself forward. And, by some luck, despite the nearly unbearable pain that came into my ankle, I managed to soar completely over the whirlpools. I slammed stomach-first into the ground. Weakly I rose to my feet and began to limp up the new path I had landed on.

Soon the smells of plants came to me, and I knew that I was getting close to the actual village. No more stupid sandstorms! I quickened my pace, and soon found green leaves rising around me. A whole village rose right before my eyes. I was finally in Cleyra.

"Welcome to Cleyra," said a Cleyran on my right.

I nodded in acknowledge to his words, then rushed up the small sand staircases. I looked around, trying to remember where everything was. Where was the Cathedral again? I could barely remember. The Cleyrans gave me curious looks, wondering what I was doing. Burmecians barely ever visited, and the

fact that I was there made them wonder.
At last my slow memory recalled the location of the Cathedral, and I rushed toward it, following the path carefully. I cleverly hid my limp, not wanting any of the Cleyrans to notice. If they did, I knew they would try to get me to stay. I didn't want to stay in Cleyra. I wanted to go somewhere, fight something.
Soon the wondrous structure of the Cathedral came into my view. The glass-like material the Cathedral was made of was admired by many who visited Cleyra. I didn't care about it, though. I pushed by the Cleyrans and entered the Cathedral freely. The Cleyrans didn't bother guarding it. They had the fancy belief that since they didn't believe in violence, those that did believe in violence wouldn't bother them. They also felt that the sandstorm would always protect them.
I felt they were pretty foolish, but you never tell a Cleyran that.
"What brings you here?" the Cleyran High Priest asked the minute I came into his view.
"I came here to seek information," I announced, coming to a stop. 'There is danger beyond the Basin. I come hoping for information on places where it may be.'
"Foolish Burmecians, with their fighting ways," the High Priest muttered. "If they didn't fight so much

they wouldn’t be targets—”
“We have done nothing to bring any attack onto us,” I snarled defensively. ‘We’ve done nothing.’
“But have you seen any enemies attack us at all?” The High Priest asked. “Even when you were attacked many years ago, they left us alone.”
“That’s because they didn’t see you! These enemies want power. They aren’t looking for threats! Why can’t you just give me what I need?” I asked.
“You don’t want to go to a place of war. Oh no. You’d be better off to go to a place with culture,” The High Priest told me.
“Culture? Are you suggesting that Burmecia has no culture?” I asked, confused by the High Priest’s words. ‘My home is in danger. Culture isn’t going to help me.’
“Culture leads to knowledge, and knowledge will lead you to the answer to your problems,” the High Priest continued. “Do you know what will happen in three days?”
I shook my head. The last time I had checked, nothing special was to happen in three days. The High Priest smiled, and his smile seemed triumphant. My eyes narrowed.
“You Burmecians are so busy with war and fighting that you do not know of everyday events. In three days is Eoroqu’s Rising,” the High Priest cooed.

If it weren't for the fact that the High Priest's last sentence confused me, I would've been screaming. Instead, my brow furrowed with confusion.
"Eoroqu's Rising?" I asked.
"You do know what Eoroqu is, right?" the High Priest asked, walking toward the opening in the Cathedral.
"Yes, of course. It's the legendary continent," I replied boldly, feeling happy that I actually knew something.
"It's no legend, my boy. It's real," the High Priest replied, smiling proudly.
"Real? Sir, Eoroqu vanished under the sea years ago," I replied. 'It's in the legend.'
"Eoroqu did not go under the sea. It merely made itself an illusion. Shamed by an attack, it hid itself under an illusion — But for reasons unknown, this illusion fails every July, for three days. That is when bold travelers like you can get to this wonderful continent. On it live the Dari," the High Priest said.
"Dari?" I asked, immediately recognizing the name.
"Yes. The Dari. A race of people just like you and I live on Eoroqu, in the middle of a desert. Their culture and values could help you. Why don't you go there?"
"I need to fight, not visit a desert tribe."
"Oh, believe me, you'll be able to fight with the

Dari. They have many values. They combine the values of Burmecia and Cleyra perfectly. They are a race you definitely should visit."
The High Priest turned his gaze on me.
"In three days Eoroqu will rise. In three days it will fall again. You have six days to make a decision," the High Priest said slowly. "I have given you information. Now please go."
I stared at the High Priest for a time, then turned around and left, frustrated. A desert tribe? Eoroqu? The combining of values? All that the High Priest had said spun inside my head, making it hard to think. As I walked toward the entrance of Cleyra, I gave my head a shake. It didn't help. I was still confused.
Soon I had reached the very entrance of the Cleyra Village. But I didn't want to leave. I had to give my ankle a rest; it was getting far more difficult to hide the limp. I turned around and looked over at Cleyra's inn.
Six days, I thought. I have six days.
Slowly I walked into the inn. A homey room that smelled of herbs welcomed me. A desk sat at the end of the room, and a Cleyran was standing there. She smiled when she saw me.
"Welcome. How long will you be staying?" the Cleyran at the desk asked.

“Two days,” I replied.
The Cleyran nodded before saying the required Gil. I gave her the Gil without trouble, then headed off into the room on my right. It was full of beds, but I didn’t really care what they were like. I simply plopped down on one and stared at the ceiling.
So Eoroqu was supposedly real, only covered by an illusion. Why? The High Priest had said it was shame. What had happened? And the Dari. I knew Aireff was Dari. Why had he come? What had happened that made him come to Burmecia and leave his hidden home?
The questions swam through my head, and suddenly I felt exceedingly tired. With a frustrated sigh, I fell into an exhausted, confused sleep.

Two days later, I was on the move. I bought any needed supplies in Cleyra, and even learned a little about Eoroqu. It happened to be the home of the Demi-humans, the elemental dragons, the Dari, and, hauntingly enough, an organization called the COL. I couldn’t get much information about what was so haunting about the COL, though; all I got was “it’s trouble”.
The COL interested me. If it was trouble, then no doubt it was what I was looking for. Therefore, having finally found something that I was truly

looking for, I set off. I passed swiftly through the sandstorm, being that my ankle had healed quickly thanks to a bit of care from the Cleyrans. I moved swiftly across the Vube Desert, taking little time to rest. By the time I reached a small passage leading to the Eesisten Coast, night had fallen.
I set up camp right near the ocean itself and slept under the stars.

I woke up early due to a mysterious noise. It took me a few minutes to locate it, but when I did, I could only stare.
Slowly appearing right before my eyes was a massive piece of land. In fact, it was more than just a piece of land. It looked to be huge, and it was appearing right in the middle of the ocean I had slept by. I could see a massive desert on the land slowly forming. Massive mountains were in the distance on this land. I could see the ocean between this land and the Mist Continent slowly becoming smaller as the land began to form completely.
Within an hour, it was over. Right in front of me was a massive continent. I could only stare at it, and as I did, I was able to witness a massive blue creature fly through the air on the continent.
“Eoroqu,” I muttered softly.
And indeed, right before me, was the mysterious,

hidden continent Eoroqu. ———— Interesting, no? An entire continent, hidden. Heh, obviously Eoroqu is my idea, but I needed a good explanation on why you never meet this place in the game! I think I did a good job with why you never see it: it's hidden ;)

Sorry about the slow update. I didn't have much time to write, and my mind choose to go dead and not think of anything =\ But now I'm back, because I know what's going to happen on Eoroqu! So stay tuned!

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Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fourteen
Eoroqu

I had loved the tales of Eoroqu. I would always dream of the majestic mountains and running rivers cutting through the plains. I would always dream of mysterious dwellers. But my dreams were nothing compared to the true continent. As I swam across the small “ocean” that separated the majestic land from the Mist Continent, I could barely believe the sheer beauty that the continent held. It made me wonder what could’ve happened to make this continent hide its beauty from the world.

Soon the water level receded, and I found myself on a small yet beautiful coast. I slowly rose to my feet and looked around. In the distance, about a mile away, I could see a massive desert. Many more miles away to my left was a cavern. And directly in front of me, far in the distance, I could see a building. Taking a deep breath, I allowed myself to smile. This just seemed too wild. I was living in my dreams.

I turned slowly to face the desert. It was so flat I could see for miles. I could see the trees of an oasis,

and beyond those trees, I could see tents — no doubt the Dari Tribe. Taking a deep breath, I walked out of the water and onto the dry sand. It felt soft against my feet. I knelt down and picked up some of the sand. It wasn't granular. It felt as soft as velvet. I rubbed the soft sand against my hand, and instead of feeling a scratchy feeling, I felt as if my hand was being massaged. I reluctantly allowed the sand to drop to the ground. Sighing softly, I rose to my feet.

"God, Freya, you would love this," I muttered softly. With another sigh, I headed in the direction of the desert. I looked at the lovely scenery with a silent sadness. I suddenly felt lonely. I felt as if I should be sharing this beauty with someone. And I wished that someone was Freya. But she was back in Burmecia, probably sick with loneliness. I shook the thought from my head. I had to keep together. I was on an unfamiliar continent. All I knew about it were the tales that I had heard as a child, and now barely remembered.

After many long minutes of walking, I found myself within the desert. As I walked, I tried desperately to remember the name of the desert. My slow memory refused to remember.

"God damn it!" I muttered angrily under my breath in a low hiss.

"Who speaks that name in vain?"

I quickly stopped moving and looks around, wondering who had spoken. The voice had been feminine and loud. It echoed around me. I felt a swoop of air above me. I looked above myself, and gasped. Flying over me was a translucent dragon-shaped, massive water form. Slowly it landed in the sands of the desert. It stared at me with watery blue eyes.

“Why are you angry?” the creature asked.

My memory immediately told me what this creature was. I could scarcely believe it. It was the legendary Water Dragon! For a few seconds I could only gawk at the massive creature before me. The Water Dragon snorted and flapped her wings irritably.

“Speak, warrior. I cannot read minds,” the Water Dragon snapped.

“Oh, eh, sorry,” I said quickly. “I’m just honored to meet you, Hyaline.”

The Water Dragon Hyaline’s eyes widened with pleasant surprise. She let out a pleased growl while she stepped closer to me.

“You know my name, warrior. How so?” she asked, her face inches away from mine.

“The legends,” I managed to say. “They spoke of you as the — the—”

“The Protector of Oceans,” Hyaline supplied for me.

‘Yes, yes, of course. But these legends were loss to

Eoroqu many a year ago. How do you know of them, warrior?'
"Lost? The Mist Continent did not lose the legends. We still have them," I told the dragon eagerly.
"Mist Continent? Oh, you're an immigrant!" Hyaline said, understanding. 'Now I understand. So you took advantage of Eoroqu's exposure?'
"Well, yes," I admitted. "But I'm not really an immigrant. I don't plan on settling here. I'm here to try and find dangers."
"You're looking for danger?" Hyaline asked. A chuckle started deep in her throat, and it soon made it out of her jaws. "How fascinating! You're looking for trouble! Well, you won't find much trouble this way. You want to turn around and head to the Fire Cavern for that." Hyaline chuckled once again.
"No, no. No trouble. My home is in trouble, and I want to find the sources of trouble. I want to get strong enough to fight the main trouble," I explained.
"Oh. A hero," Hyaline said with a snort. 'Well, you should still turn around, but this time you should go east and head to the COL. They are trouble for you, that is for sure.'
"The COL?" I asked.
"'Collaboration of Leviathan.' They want your race to be extinct," Hyaline explained.

I could only stare with shock. Hyaline lifted a large, translucent talon and tapped me lightly on the head with its sharp tip.
“You alive in there?” Hyaline asked.
“That trouble — is a bit too strong for me right now,” I managed to say. ‘I need to get stronger before I take them on.’
“I agree. Julius would tear you apart,” Hyaline growled. “But how will going this way make you stronger?”
“Well, the Cleyran High Priest suggested that I go to the Dari to ‘gain knowledge’,” I said bitterly.
Hyaline chuckled. “Knowledge? The Dari have more than knowledge, you know. They have customs, traditions, and many more amazing things. A trip to them will indeed do you wonders, warrior.”
“But do they fight?” I asked.
“They believe in the Paladin of Heaven. Of course they fight,” Hyaline snorted. ‘They fight in Her name.’
“Paladin of Heaven?” I asked.
“A majestic creature, part dragon, part bird,” Hyaline said. ‘She is said to lead the good to Her domain once they pass, and Her brother the Paladin of Evil leads the bad down to hell.’
“So she is basically the Great Dragon?” I asked.
“Yes, I guess so,” Hyaline said. ‘She appears

everywhere. I dare say everyone worships Her in some way.'
"Do you?" I asked curiously.
"Yes. She is the Guardian of Dragons to me," Hyaline said happily. 'She is my guardian, my instructor.' "The Great Dragon is said to rest in Eoroqu," I suddenly remembered out loud.
"Yes," Hyaline said, winking. 'The entrance to Her domain is on this continent. If you really want to gain power, that if where you want to go.'
"Really? An entrance to Heaven? Here?" I asked, excited.
Hyaline chuckled once more. "I think I said too much. But yes, there is an entrance to Heaven. And so far you are on the right track to gain access to it. Go to the Dari. Learn from them. Then head toward the place that you see in your dreams."
Suddenly Hyaline's wings spread out. With one massive leap, and a quick flapping of her wings, the Water Dragon was airborne. She growled at me lightly, nodded her head in farewell, then headed off in the direction I had originally been heading. I quickly began to run after her, but she was far too fast for me to keep up.

Hours of running soon led me to a natural wonder. I find myself faced with a mile-long patch

of green land, square in the middle of a desert. Palm trees bowed lazily in the soft wind. White rocks lay scattered in not-so-random positions near the trees. In the center of the land was a large pool of crystal blue water. The water was the same color Hyaline had been.

It was an oasis. I stepped carefully into the beautiful land, looking around carefully. Soon I had reached the water's shore. I was surprised to see that the water seemed to be within a cliff. The land simply dropped from sea level and the bottom of the pool was lost in darkness. I knelt beside the water and began to drink, understanding that the water was clean.

After a long drink I leaned against a palm tree and stared at the blue sky. There was no mist on Eoroqu, and I was able to admire the sky and its soft clouds that were drifting lazily in the sky. I sighed softly and closed my eyes. I had almost fallen asleep when I heard something move.

I leapt to my feet and searched for the source of the movement. Soon I found the source, and stared with shock.

Standing in front of me was a Burmecian with chestnut fur. She wore a white robe that ended a few inches above her feet. Her tail was dark brown, while her hair was roan. She cocked her head

slightly, staring at me with brilliant green eyes. I stared in return, having never seen a Burmecian with fur that wasn't white.
"Hello," I said quickly, using a Burmecian accent.
The girl smiled. "'Ello."
Now I was surprised. The girl spoke with Aireff's accent!
"Where did ya come from?" the girl asked. 'I've neve' seen ya 'round.'
"I don' live 'ere," I replied, switching to my natural accent. "I'm from Burmecia."
The girl looked surprised. She soon smiled, though.
"Really? You don' speak like one," she replied. 'Look like one, though.'
"My papá was Dari," I told her.
"Ah. That explains it," the girl replied. "Neve' knew Dari and Burmecian could actually get 'long."
The girl walked over and held out her hand.
"Name's María," the girl said.
I took her hand in mine and shook it.
"Fratley," I said.
María nodded. "Nice ta meet ya."
"Same ta ya."
"So ya came from Burmecia? 'Ow's the weather up there?" María asked.
"Wet, as always," I said, rolling my eyes. "'Ow about ye weather?"

“Dry, as always,” María said, giggling. ‘Funny, ‘ow different our weathe’ is. Buemcia’s wet, Cleyra’s sandy, and Dari’s dry.’
“Not really that odd. We live in different places,” I pointed out.
“Exactly. We’re the same people, but we’re all so different. I mean, look at ya. Ya are not even capable of ‘aving any othe’ color than white.”
“Well, we can get a little gray.”
“We can get black.”
I could only stare with shock. María giggled. She then began to walk away.
“Come on,” she said, looking back at me. “I’ll lead ya to the Tribe.”
I stood blinking for a few seconds. I then began to follow María to her home.

The walk to the Dari Tribe was long, but María proved to be an interesting companion. She liked to talk about many odd things. She spoke of my clothing, then compared it to hers. She then spoke of my hair, and how it was similar to hers. Soon I got bored with her talk, and I didn’t even listen. I don’t think she really cared.
Soon I could make out every single tent within the Dari Tribe, and I was surprised at its size. The variation of the colors of its inhabitants surprised me

even more. It looked as if not one Dari was white. I saw grays, browns, roans, blacks, and, to my surprise, a blue.
“Do ya ’ave any whites?” I asked.
“Oh, yes, there’s,” María began, and she began to rattle off names. I ignored her, and instead found myself distracted.
Approaching us was a blue-furred male. He had black hair that reached his shoulders. His tail was black. His eyes were blue, and he wore white pants with no shirt. He smiled at me.
“’Ello, traveler,” the male said.
“’Ello,” I said, glad to get away from María and her constant chatter. “I am Fratley, a Dragon Warrior from Burmecia. I was directed here from Cleyra.”
“Ah, I see,” the male said, smiling. ‘I am Ronde, spelled ‘R-O-N-D— E’, not ‘R-A-N-D-Y’. I am the leader of the Dari Tribe. I welcome you to our humble… Whatever-it-is.’
I chuckled. “It’s a community.”
Ronde laughed. “It’s too small to be a community!”
“Who are ya speakin’ too, Ronde?”
Ronde and I both turned around to see a woman approaching. She had dark gray fur with a black tail. Her hair was also black, and her eyes were a very dark brown. She wore a white robe and from what I could see, she appeared to be pregnant. She crossed

her arms across her chest and viewed Ronde with a mischievous look.
“What are ya doing?” she asked. “We are supposed ta be holdin’ a ceremony and there ya go, wanderin’ off…”
“I was welcomin’ a Dragon Warrior, which ya should’ve been doin’,” Ronde replied, smiling.
The woman rolled her eyes and let out a fake cough. “Puh.”
I couldn’t help but grin.
“Ya will ‘ave ta excuse ’er. This is Lizzy, my wife. She’s expecting, but she won’ tell me when the kids are supposed ta be born,” Ronde said.
“That’s because I don’ even know,” Lizzy spat.
I shook my head. “I don’ need ta excuse anythin’, sir. I’m used to women like ’er.”
“Oh, and ’ow is that?” Lizzy asked me.
“My mothe’,” I muttered. Ronde laughed, and Lizzy grinned.
“She a Dari?” Lizzy asked.
“No, that’s the funny part. My fathe’ is the Dari,” I replied.
Lizzy laughed. “’E must’ve done stuff ta ’er.”
“Last time I checked, she was always like that,” I replied.
“All right, then the Paladin of Heaven did somethin’ ta ’er. There,” Lizzy said with a snort.

Ronde shook his head. “Be nice, Liz.”
“Not today. I’ll be nice tomorrow,” Lizzy replied.
Ronde sighed. “Unbelievable.”
“What ceremony were ya holdin’?” I asked.
“Oh, just a simple one,” Lizzy told me. ‘We were merely askin’ blessings from the Paladin of Heaven, asking ‘Er to bless us with a good ’unt. Nothin’ much.’
“Yet she gets mad ove’ it,” Ronde muttered with a sigh.
“Well, we could starve if She decides not ta bless us because we’re more concerned with a Dragon Warrior than food,” Lizzy growled, putting her hands on her hips.
I laughed. “Uh oh. She’s mad.”
“And that’s not a good thing,” Ronde muttered. ‘Liz, be a good girl and lead ‘im to ’is room, would ya? I’ll go back ta the ceremony and take ove’.’
“Oh fine,” Lizzy snorted. “Come on, whoever-ya-are. I’ll show ya ye room.”
“I’m Fratley,” I supplied for the woman.
“Oh, fine then, Fratley-ya-are. Let’s go,” Lizzy said with a smirk.
I smiled sympathetically at Ronde, understanding how hard having a woman just like Rose for a wife must be. I then followed the woman into the camp.
“So, where are the ceremonies ’eld?” I asked.

“Depends on which one we’re ‘oldin’. If we’re ‘oldin’ one for a ‘unt, it’s held near the ’Untin’ Grounds. If we’re tryin’ to bless a birth, it’s held in the tent that the birth ‘appened in. That I’m not lookin’ forward ta. I really don’ want people blessin’ me right in my face when I’m being concerned with childbirth,” Lizzy said with a snort.

I chuckled. “That sucks. No privacy?”

“Nada,” Lizzy said in agreement.

We walked through the center of the Tribe until we approached a highly decorated tent. Lightning designs were painted on the otherwise plain leather tent. Lizzy slipped into the tent, and I followed. I was shocked to find the tent to be much larger inside than it had looked. Slips of fabric acted as walls, and you could push them open to get to the other parts of the tent. It was just like a moveable house.

“This’ll be ya tent,” Lizzy said. “Everythin’ ya need is in ’ere for now. But be ready ta ’ave ta trade for stuff.”

I nodded, exploring the tent with interest. In the center was a fireplace, and a small hole was in the top of the tent to allow the smoke out. As I continued to explore, I found a kettle along with pots, pans, utensils, and other things needed to cook.

“Ya probably won’ need those,” Lizzy said. ‘We usually cook a large meal in the cente’ of the Tribe

and ya jus' take what ya want.'
I nodded. I then slid into another "room". Within it was a large pile of blankets and pillows on the floor.
"Bed. Well, a make-ye-own bed," Lizzy said with a soft chuckle.
I nodded. Everything in the house was simple, and it contrasted greatly from Burmecia. Yet somehow it seemed homey. I turned to Lizzy.
"Thank ya," I said.
"Don' mention it," Lizzy said with a smile. She then turned around and left.
I looked around and sighed softly. It suddenly seemed awfully cool within the tent. I looked down at the blankets. I then tried to make a cozy bed. Eventually I succeeded in making it cozy, if not bed-like. I lied down on the blankets and made myself comfortable. Soon I fell asleep, and I found myself dreaming of home.

When I woke up, I woke to find darkness. Night had descended. I waited until my eyes had adjusted to the darkness. I then rose to my feet and left the tent. I was surprised to see a large fire set up in the middle of the Tribe. A few Dari were gathered around the tent. In their hands or nearby they had woven cups. I could see a dark liquid within the cups. Quickly I jogged over.

“’Ello,” a black-furred, blue-eyed Dari said.
“‘Ello,” I replied. “What are ya all doin’?”
“Stayin’ up late,” a roan-furred, yellow-eyed Dari replied. “Sit down. ‘Ave some wine. Stay up wit’ us.”
I sat down next to the black-furred Dari, and he gave me a woven cup full of the dark wine. I took a sip, and found it to be far stronger than Burmecian wine. I wouldn’t allow my surprise to show, though. I instead looked at my companions. There were four of them: the black-furred, blue— eyed male, the roan-furred, yellow-eyed female, a white-furred, orange-eyed female, and a light brown-furred, blue-eyed female.
“So, who are ya all?” I asked.
“Rex, but my friends call me ‘Haunted’,” the black-eyed male said.
“Sarah,” the roan-furred female said.
“Ana María,” the white-furred female said quietly.
“Sky,” the brown-furred female said. “Though where m’ parents got that I don’ know.”
The group laughed softly.
“Mus’ be ye eyes,” Rex said.
“Bette’ be. If it’s m’ fur, I’m scared,” Sky replied.
The group laughed softly again. I sipped at the wine, listening intently.
“Yeah, well where’d ‘Rex’ come from? Do I look

like a ‘Rex’?” Rex asked.
“Well, ya are ‘haunting’, so why don’ ya jus’ change ye name ta ‘Haunted’?” Sky asked.
“‘Cause it’s bette’ as a nickname, not a name,” Rex replied.
“I was named Sarah, though. Oh! So creative!” Sarah said sarcastically.
And again, laughter spread through the group. I noticed, however, that Ana María didn’t make a sound. I mentioned this to Rex in a whisper.
“Fathe’ died two days ago,” Rex whispered to me. “Kind o’ ‘asn’ gotten over it yet.”
That explained it. I watched her with sympathy as she sipped absentmindedly at her wine. Her eyes were sad, as was her manner. She sighed softly, clearly not noticing anything around her. The group continued to laugh and joke.
Soon I fell into my own world as well. As I stared at the flames, the flames showed me home once more. It showed me the fireplace of my house. It showed my family joking merrily. And of course it showed Freya. It seemed to focus on her.
“Ya all right?”
Rex’s voice merely floated through my head without ever making it through my thoughts. I sipped at my wine, but didn’t notice its taste. I only noticed the visions in the fire.

“Leave ‘im alone. ’E’s jus’ ’omesick,” Sarah said quietly, and her voice too was filtered through my mind without making it through.
But she was right. I was homesick. I was missing home, and wishing I hadn’t had the burden of saving my home. I was wishing someone could’ve understood my worries, and at least had gone to do something so I could stay home. I wished I could’ve brought someone with me.
I wished Freya was with me.

—————— Oh m’ God, I updated! Hmm, the end of this chapter sucks. Oh well, I was getting Writer’s Block near the end of it O.o I’m so sorry about the slow update; once again, it’s because of Writer’s Block. But now I’m back, and hopefully I’ll stay back! =D Yay!

Please note that this story is full of slight inaccuracies — Some of you have already noticed them. I apologize; I’m not perfect

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Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Fifteen
Nomadic Learning

I had not expected to learn so much from the Dari. I, most likely like all Burmecians who visited before me, expected the Dari to be very crude in society, and barely able to survive. But within the first six months of living there, I was proved extremely wrong.

The first thing I learned was that the Dari were anything but barely able to survive. When I was showed where to get food, I was shocked at the fact that they had more food that Burmecia probably had. They told me most of it would be used for when the herds left. It was a store for the winter, already being created in July. There was enough food to last any winter, no matter how harsh. Furthermore, there were barrels of water, gathered from the oasis, rare rainstorms, and even geysers that suddenly came up “when the inhabitants of hell got angry”.

The next thing that I was supposed to learn was the religion. I quickly found it wasn’t necessary. The religions of Burmecia and the Dari were exactly the same except for a few word changes. The Dari also

spent a lot more time at ceremonies than did Burmecia, though I was told not to worry. According to Lizzy, there were so many ceremonies that half the Dari didn't bother going to them.

From there, the real learning starting. For three months I found myself learning about the many trades that the Dari specialized in. I watched with suppressed amazement as they carved their own tools, weapons, utensils, and items via simple methods. Burmecia bought most of their supplies, since it was too busy with its warlike customs to bother with much manufacturing. But these people seemed to live on manufacturing, and I wanted to pick up a skill. But first I had to see them all — And there were so many, it took three months to see them all and make a decision.

I choose jewel carving. I don't know why to this day. There was just something about it that seemed proper. The Dari seemed pleased and surprised with such a decision. For the next three months, I was trained in jewel carving, while learning other things in the process.

I learned about working together, about contemplation before actions, about listening to people, and about thousands of other things that I had overlooked as unimportant while in Burmecia. Yet while I learned these things, something told me

that these things would not help me. It was something else I needed to learn before I would leave the Dari. I knew it, and I wouldn't leave until I felt I was ready.
The Dari seemed pleased with my decision.

"Fratley!"
I looked up and saw one of the main hunters staring down at me. The sun already beginning to set, even though it was only two hours past noon. The weather was much cooler than normal. I was told it was because of the approach of winter.
"What is it?" I asked, confused on what the hunter asked.
"The 'erds 'ave come for one last time," the main hunter said. 'I'd like ya ta join us.'
"All right," I said calmly, though I was actually quite surprised. "I'm comin'."
The main hunter left while I rose to my feet. I knew what I'd need. I put on my traveling outfit, which the warmest thing I had, and the best for the weather. I then grabbed my spear and walked outside.
No one was outside, which was pretty amazing. I could hear voices a good distance away from the camp, though. I ran in the direction of the voices. I soon saw the hunters, and began to run more quickly toward them. Soon, however, a different sight made

me screech to stop and stare with shock.
Behind the hunters, about 20 meters away, were massive, hairless beasts. They appeared to be equines, except that they were massive. They had massive, cleaved hooves and strong, muscular legs. They had massive wings sprouting from a massive hump on their back. These wings had spikes at the ends, making them look lethal. They had long, whip-like tails. They had massive heads, with huge, twelve-point horns with the sharpest tips I could ever remember seeing on a beast. They were pawing at the sand with their massive hooves, searching for food.
“Like ’em?” a hunter asked me, bringing me back to reality. ‘Aren’t they gorgeous?’
“They must be deadly,” I muttered.
“That they are, and that’s why the warriors hunt,” the hunter said, smiling proudly. ‘Hunting those brutes is like attacking a horde of dragons.’
“They look slow,” I commented.
“They can be pretty slow walking, but when running or flying they are swift. And they don’t waste time blasting you with fire—”
“Fire?” I asked, stunned. ‘How the hell do ya bring those things down?’
“Work and luck,” the hunter replied.
“Gather!” the main hunter shouted.

Immediately everyone, including me, walked over. The hunter then began to talk, but not with vocals. The massive beasts that we would hunt were already wary of our presence. Voices would scare them, but they did not understand hand signals. The only problem was the fact that I didn't understand them either. Without making a sound I tried to make sense of them.

First the main hunter motioned toward the beasts. He then pointed two fingers at two hunters, and motioned toward the beasts again. The two hunters nodded and headed toward chocobos that had been waiting patiently near the hunters the whole time. The main hunter then motioned toward the beasts again, then pointed to two more hunters. The hunters nodded and headed off. The main hunter then motioned to the beasts once more, and pointed to me and the hunter I had been talking with. I nodded automatically, and we headed toward the chocobos.

"What'd he say?" I muttered under my breath.

"Just watch me," the hunter whispered back.

I walked over to one of the yellow chocobos. It chirped softly. I simply stared at it, not recalling how to mount. The chocobo gave me a bit of assistance, lowering its body so I could simply get on without much trouble. The chocobo rose to full height. Its brown eyes focused on the beasts below.

“Your chocobo knows what ta do,” the hunter beside me said. “Just follow it.”
I nodded while I wrapped one arm around the chocobo’s neck. I kept the other arm ready to grab my spear.
Soon all the hunters were on chocobos. My chocobo shifted restlessly. It shifted its gaze to the main hunter. The main hunter nodded. Once again the chocobo’s gaze shifted, but this time, it ran forward. Soon, we were both moving. I kept myself strangely calm. Somehow I didn’t get thrown off, and someone I didn’t have a heart attack as the chocobo let out a powerful scream.
Now the beasts were panicked. A few took the skies. Spears shot through the air and ripped the wings of these beasts. The beasts in the air snarled and managed to land safely. My chocobo veered toward one of the beasts. It snarled, seeing me, and prepared a fiery spell. Realizing quickly what I had to do, I grabbed my spear. The beast reared upward onto its hind legs gathering the spell into its mouth.
My chocobo zoomed straight under the beast. I slammed my spear into the beast’s stomach and dragged it along with me. As the chocobo emerged on the other side of the startled beast, its stomach was torn open. The beast roared, choked on its one fire, and fell to the ground. The other beasts,

alarmed by the smell of blood, began to back away. White began to show in their eyes as they spread their massive wings and took to the air. The beasts with torn wings, however, roared pitifully and they reared backward and ran away on powerful legs. None of the hunters chased them, so I didn't either. We simply watched them retreat.

"Wow," I muttered. 'That wasn't so hard.'

A hunter laughed as he approached. "That's because you weren't with the others. You got Hurricane, and you got the kill."

"Hurricane?" I asked.

"The chocobo. Dead clever, that one. The other chocobos got a little spooked," the hunter said, motioning to the others. 'We suffered a few injuries, nothing major. Today was a fairly good hunt. Usually the beasts do a little more than this. I guess they were startled.'

"HEY!"

We all turned in the direction of the new voice. A smiling Dari was running toward us. He soon came to a stop and regarded us with orange eyes.

"You guys are not going to believe this," he said, smiling.

"Believe what?" a hunter asked.

"Lizzy gave birth," the Dari said.

"Holy crap, you serious?" the main hunter asked.

The Dari nodded. “As serious as I can get. And here’s the wild part: she gave birth to five kids.”
All of us stared with shock. The main hunter let out a sharp bark of laughter.
“I feel sorry for her. Did she live?” The main hunter asked.
“Yes, she’s alive. And grumpy,” the Dari said, rolling his eyes.
“No surprise,” the main hunter muttered. He then smiled. ‘Well, this day is full of good news. We caught a beast, and the Dragon Warrior caught it. The rest of us suffered minimum injuries.’
“Really? That’s wonderful! Lizzy will be happy to hear it… When’s she done complaining, that is,” the Dari said, chuckling. “Well, I’ll leave you to your work and deliver the good news.”
“All right, guys. Time to do the not-so-thrilling work,” the main hunter said. ‘Hauling this thing to the butcher.’
Everyone groaned except me, who smiled good-naturedly. I couldn’t explain it, but something had put me in a really good mood. Nothing, not even having to help haul a 700-pound beast, could ruin it. I really wished I could escape and stop by Lizzy’s to give her a hello and a “congratulations from hell”, as she called them, but it would have to wait. Besides, she deserved the privacy, that was certain.

Within a few moments we had the beast wrapped tightly in ropes, and the ropes either tied to chocobos or being held by hunters. The hauling then began. I was lucky enough not to have to hold a rope; I instead made sure the ropes on the beast wouldn't snap. It was a hard enough job, and I was thankful I didn't have to worry about pulling anything.

Soon the beast was at the butcher, and the hunters were free to leave. Most headed back to their homes to escape the chill, but I headed toward the main tent. It was surprising quiet for a tent that held five newborn kids and a cranky mother. I walked up to the entrance, but did not enter.

"I request permission to enter," I announced, accidentally switching to my Burmecian accent.

"Fine fool, but it's ye funeral," Lizzy replied, chuckling.

I entered the tent and headed into the back room. Lizzy was in the bed, and indeed there were five kids. Two of them had black fur, another had red fur, another had blue, and the last was pure white. They all appeared to be sleeping — Thankfully.

"You've had quite the day," I said to Lizzy before nodding silently at Ronde.

"Yeah, it's been pretty damn delightful," Lizzy said. "Now I 'ave ta think o' five names…"

I laughed. "Now, now. Isn't Ronde going to help?"

“‘E says ’e can’ think o’ anything’,” Lizzy complained. “And neither can I!”
I leaned to the best of my ability against the loose tent fabric as I stared at the new parents. Couldn’t think of names? I could think of about ten right off the top of my head.
“Why are ya starin’ at us like that?” Lizzy asked.
I smiled. “Nothin’. Good luck ta ya.”
I turned around and left, allowing the couple to figure out what I had been smiling about. By now, the sun had lowered below the horizon, and darkness and chill were quickly descending upon the desert. Everyone was gathering around the main fire, which was roasting meat from the storage, since the freshly caught beast had not yet been completely prepared by the butcher. Most of the Dari were chatting merely, but I was able to see a few who were quiet and simply going for the purpose of food.
“Hey Fratley!”
I turned in the direction of the familiar voice to find a gray— furred, blue-eyed Burmecian named Jason smiling at me. He, like me, had traveled from Burmecia, but he had never returned. He never told me what had made him stay. I suspected that it was law trouble.
“Hello,” I said, automatically reverting to a Burmecian accent, since he spoke it as well. ‘How

are you doing?'
"Pretty well. I heard you went on the hunt, and made the kill. What luck," Jason said with a soft chortle.
"News travels quickly in this place," I replied, amused. 'Did you do anything half as interesting?'
"Nothing even a quarter as interesting," Jason replied, rolling his eyes. "Nothing at all…"
I caught a note of doubt in his voice. My brow furrowed slightly as I stared at him.
"Nothing?" I asked.
"Of course. Nothing," Jason assured me, but it was too late. Doubt and worry had flowed into his voice.
"You're lying, aren't you?" I asked suspiciously. 'I hear it in your voice.'
"No, no! I — I mean, well," Jason said, then trailed off.
"You're lying," I said. 'What did you do?'
Jason swallowed. "You promise not to tell?"
Now I understood. Jason had done something against Dari law. He was my friend, one of the first I had made when I first came to the Dari. But breaking the law was wrong, regardless of whether you were in Burmecia or not. I had been taught that in Burmecia. I had sworn an oath. But now I was faced with a decision. Make a promise to a friend? Or keep my oath? Slowly my mind told me what was more important, and my eyes narrowed slightly.

“I can’t make that promise,” I muttered.
Jason’s eyes widened slightly. Clearly he had not expected my answer. We were pretty good friends, after all. He probably figured I’d let him get away with whatever he did. Jason backed a few feet away, then slipped away into the darkness. I watched him go, then sighed. He had done something wrong if he wouldn’t tell me. It was probably stealing — Stealing was a very devastating crime in the Dari. Murders were so rare that stealing was just about as bad as a murder. It was fairly strict. No wonder Jason wouldn’t tell. Yet should I say something?
Suddenly I found I had no appetite anymore. I turned away from the fire and headed back to my tent. Its small size comforted me, and I found myself getting tired. Yawning slightly, I walked into the “bedroom” and lied down on the “bed”. I stared at the ceiling of the tent, which was bluish from the darkness. What should I do?
I never thought up of a plan, for I soon fell asleep.

I was able to see clearly ahead of me. Endless plains surrounded me. Everywhere I looked, I saw green. People moved steadily along barely paved roads, trailing goods behind them. These people were half-breeds of many kinds: cats, dogs, birds, fish, even monsters. They were Demi-humans.

Then something in the distance caught my attention. A massive mountain range with an endless lightning storm over it. I stared and stared at the mountains. Something within my mind spoke…
'Come to me, come. I hold what you need to accomplish your goals…'
The voice continued to speak to me in taunting tones…

I woke up feeling confused, yet soon I knew what had happened. I had had the dream. I now knew where to go.

——— Bah, school needs to die! Because of it I couldn't update… Grrrr! =(Sorry, I was loaded with a ton of work for the past few weeks, and it's not over. I'll try to update, but I haven't been able to write until tonight! I'm so sorry, and I'm very tried of making excuses! Please bear with me!

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Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Sixteen
The Heart of Eoroqu

Leaving the Dari was much harder than I had imagined. I really hadn't known how many friends I had made in the small tribe. The Dari seemed truly upset that I was leaving, but at the same time, they seemed to understand that I had to leave. Lizzy looked about ready to cry and strangle me at the same time, and she only proved to be more like Rose, making me rather homesick. Regardless, my dream stayed planted in my mind, and I knew that I had to move.

"All right," Ronde said, taking a massive map from out of his tent. 'Ya say ya 'ad a dream? And that in that dream ya saw a vision?'

"Yes," I replied, and as Ronde unrolled the map, I explained my dream. Ronde nodded.

"I recognize the description. You're dreamin' o' the Thunder Mountains area," Ronde said, pointing to the lower right portion of the large map. 'You've got the Aregui Plains, then a small strip of land that really doesn't 'ave much o' a name, then the actual mountains. They're a pretty small mountain range

compared to the Liosa Mountains, but just as dangerous. O' course, if ya want ta avoid the dangers ya can take the Orca River, but ya probably want ta go in the mountains, right?' I nodded. "Ah, that's what I thought. Well, then you're best ta go east, cross the Orca River, then head straight ta the Mountains."

I nodded, watching Ronde point to things on the map as he talked. The route looked pretty straightforward. Simply cross a river and then the mountains…

"What is the Orca like?" I asked curiously, wondering of the river was more than it seemed.

"It's a pretty rough river," Ronde told me, seeming concerned. 'Accordin' ta the records, it was used ta punish people by drownin' them. The rapids are fierce and therefore it's easy ta get thrown into a rock. When crossing I suggest ya exercise caution.'

I nodded. "Yes. Thank ya for the information."

"Ya jus' be careful, all right? Ya stayed for a lot shorte' time than I imagined," Ronde said. He then sighed. "Guess I can' stop ya, though. Good luck ta ya."

I nodded again, feeling numb. I then turned around and left the building. I still had a few more good byes to administer, though I had already said good bye to most of the tribe. I saw Jason, but decided not

to talk to him. I didn’t want to associate with the criminal, lest I fall to his trick.

Finally, I was ready. I had gathered up all my stuff and contemplated my best actions. I decided I would try to avoid Orca River to the best of my ability, though it would take longer to cross. I recalled that by going northeast, I would reach the hunted Illiad forest that held the dryads and elves. I knew that you could pay them to help you through the forest. Once out of it, I would be in the Aregui Plains, where I could swiftly cross and get to the Thunder Mountains, all in only a week or so of travel. It was a long time, but it was a lot safer than trying to risk a dangerous river.

I took one last look around the homey tent that had been my home for over three months. I had grown to appreciate it and love it. Beds would never seem right again. Civilization seemed so frivolous when compared to the simple yet wonderful ways of the Dari. I had gotten over my homesickness, having come to appreciate the Tribe. It would be sad to leave it, but I knew I had to. Burmecia was still in danger. Beatrix was still in Alexandria. I had to move on.

I took a deep breath and let it out in a soft sigh. I then turned around and left the tent. The Dari were

going about their daily business, understanding that they couldn't stop me from leaving. I shifted my pack slightly. It was heavy with food and water, making it a burden on my shoulders. I continued to walk through the Tribe, and soon was stopped by Lizzy.

"So ya are leavin'?" she asked. She then frowned slightly. "Ya seemed troubled."

Indeed, Lizzy's appearance had made me remember what had happened with Jason and I last night. I took a deep breath and looked over at Lizzy.

"You know Jason?" I asked.

"Aye," Lizzy replied. "What 'bout 'im?"

I took a deep breath once again. Should I rat on Jason? He was supposed to be a friend, yet should my friends be criminals? I gave myself a quick shake, however, and continued.

"He's trouble. Just watch out for 'im," I said.

"Okay, will do," Lizzy sat. She gave me a playful smack across the shoulder. 'Don' get yeself killed, 'right?'

I laughed. "All right, but ya may kill me with your smacks."

Lizzy grinned. "Oh, shut up and get movin'. Otherwise ya will never get out."

I smiled and nodded. We shook hands one final time. I then turned around and began to slide

between tents to head in a northeast direction. I received plenty of smiles and “good luck”, but not a single ‘don’t leave’ or “stay a bit”. The Dari were so different from Burmecians. They knew that once you had your mind made up, it was foolish to try and change it.
Soon I reached the outskirts of the Tribe, where few wandered. The distant scenery was slowly becoming noticeable as the tents thinned out. It became easier to walk since no one was around.
Finally I reached the end of the Tribe. Ahead of me was endless desert, desert that I didn’t want to spend a lot of time in. I took a deep breath and looked behind me at the great tribe that had accepted me with little problems.
“Thank you,” I muttered, going back to my Burmecian accent.
I then turned around and raced northeast as fast as I could, hoping to read the Illiad Forest swiftly.

Within two hours of running, the Lore Desert at last began to thin out. Precious green grasses began to dare poke their heads through the sand while the temperature began to decrease. In the distance, I could see a massive, blackish-green forest in the distance. More eastward I could see the whitish blue waters of the raging Orca River. It didn’t look like

proper excitement, and I felt relieved that I could avoid it. Unfortunately, tales about Illiad Forest kept me from feeling full confidence.

Whole armies were rumored to disappear within the blackish forest. It was said that the dark green color came from being black with evil. Supposedly the red flowers were red with blood. Even its name was ominous. Illiad meant “death” in the ancient Demi-human language.

I continued running even as the desert thinned out, breathing in steady gasps from my mouth. My legs were getting tired, but I wanted to find shade before I relaxed. Even though it was winter, I was hot from the entire running. I knew I would probably be hotter if I didn’t wear my traveler’s outfit; it was made for hard running, and therefore light. I didn’t have to worry about it being bulky and hot.

Finally, after another 30 minutes of running, the desert was behind me. I was in a small strip of unnamed territory that lasted for two miles. The Illiad Forest was large even from two miles away. I could see no trees in sight. It was as if the forest had sucked them all in.

I collapsed to the ground purposely and rolled a bit in the grasses until I found myself staring at the sky, gasping for breath. The sky was grayish from winter’s coming, with a few stray blackish clouds

passing by. It looked like it was going to rain, but I didn't mind. It would help cool me off.
"You look like you've run a mile."
I leapt to my feet at the sound of the new voice and looked around frantically. The voice sounded female and held a melodic sound. Soon, I spotted the speaker. I blinked with surprise. The speaker was human-like. She wore brown clothes decorated with leaves on the edges of the sleeves of her shirt and the edges of her pants. She had long reddish hair that reached to the middle of her back, along with pointed ears and a pretty face. She had green eyes and pale skin. She watched me curiously.
An elf. They were as pretty as the stories told.
"Hello," I said quietly, watching her.
"Hello to you," the elf said. 'You don't look like a Dari. Don't sound it either. May I ask where you are from?'
"Burmecia," I replied. "I'm Sir Fratley of Burmecia."
"Ah, a traveler. I'm Element, Elf of Illiad. Pleasure to meet you," the elf said, walking over and extending a short-nailed hand.
I was surprised at Element's height. She had to be around six feet tall. Regardless, I wouldn't let my surprise show. I took her hand and shook it.
"Same to you. Why are you not in the Forest?" I

asked.
“I’m a scout. I search for people who may try to go through the Forest. I help direct them through,” Element explained. ‘Will you need directing?’
“Yes, I’m afraid. I need to pass through it to get to the Aregui while avoiding the Orca River,” I explained.
“Ah, I see. Your trip will be easy. Just follow me,” Element said. She then began a swift walk toward the Illiad Forest.
Though still exhausted, I knew there would be no rest from here. I swiftly began to follow Element toward the Forest. Both of us were swift walkers, but it still took about an hour before we reached Illiad Forest. Slowly trees began to appear. These trees had dark brown, almost black, trunks with sharp, formidable bark. The leaves on the trees were thick and an extremely dark green. The ground was also beginning to turn darker, while red flowers were beginning to show up. Bats could be seen hanging in the trees, resting until nightfall, or until the full darkness of the forest came about. Haunting calls traveled through the forest as Night Stalkers, rumored to be huge bear-wolves, called to each other.
Neither Element nor I seemed frightened. Element seemed used to the forest and its haunting ways; I

had trust in the elf's abilities. We walked silently, weaving our way through the trees and deeper into the forest. I began to get an odd feeling that someone was watching us. Eyes seemed to be within the trees. It seemed like a creature was constantly in the trees. Paranoia, a rare trait in my mind, suddenly seemed to become the dominant thought. I began to look around constantly.

"Don't let it get to you. Take a deep breath and relax. The Forest's spell will kill you," Element suddenly said, startling me into taking out my spear.

I decided to obey her, despite the paranoia. I took a deep breath and tried to relax. I kept repeating the process. The eyes in the trees disappeared, while the creatures vanished. The paranoia left, and I was left feeling relieved.

"Feel better?" Element asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"Such is the Illiad Forest's spell. You attack something, and then you are dead," Element muttered.

I chose not to ask what she meant, being too busy trying to relax. The rest of the 45-minute walk through Illiad Forest passed in silence.

"Here you are, the end of the line," Element said.

At last the end of the Forest had come. I stepped out

into the cross section of the Aregui Plains and Illiad Forest. The air was getting colder as the skies were getting darker. It was either going to rain, or it was becoming night. Either way, I shivered from the cold. I turned to think Element, only to find she was gone. I was on my own once again.

I had traveled a lot farther than I had intended in one day. Now I only had a few more days travel. As I looked to the distance, I saw a grand city, and even farther away, black mountains. I could see black clouds over these mountains, and lightning streaking from the clouds. The Thunder Mountains were within my view.

I yawned, suddenly finding myself sleepy. I took my pack aside and searched for the tent within it. I soon found it, and within moments had a small camp set up and a small fire to ward off monsters started. I ate a small meal of bread and cheese, then crawled into the tent. It didn't seem awkward to be in a tent after being with the Dari, but it did seem odd to have a tent so small. Regardless, exhaustion kept away all discomfort. Soon, I had fallen into a dreamless sleep.

The next day showed itself to be very dreary and unpleasant. Cold rain was whipped about by a fierce wind. Regardless, I was moving by dawn, hoping to

cover a lot of distance. The plains seemed to be rather endless, and I wanted to move quickly.

I wasn't the only one moving, it seemed. Demi-humans were also moving along the barely paved yet somehow marked roads. Many had merchant wagons with them. None of them seemed to find me absurd. Most simply glanced briefly at me and continued on their way. I, on the other hand, watched them curiously. Each seemed to have a different animal in them. Soon it almost became a game for me to guess what each Demi-human was part.

"Enjoying yourself, Burmecian?"

I turned in the direction of the voice, to find a human staring at me. She had dark brown hair, hazel eyes, metal armor covering her body completely, and a sword over her shoulder. I could immediately see she was a warrior.

"If I am, what about it?" I asked suspiciously.

"Nothing at all. I just thought a warrior would have a little more sense and maturity to him," the woman said.

I stopped in my tracks, as did the woman. We stared at each other.

"You seem familiar," I muttered.

"Don't see why," The woman replied. 'We've never seen each other before this time.'

“You look like Beatrix,” I spat.
“That I’m definitely not. Right hair color, wrong clothing, eyes, and warrior class. Besides, I’ve never even been to Alexandria,” the woman said, taking her sword off her shoulder and swinging it about idly. She looked me in the eye. ‘I’m Violet. Who are you?’
“Fratley,” I replied, relaxing slightly.
“Nice to meet you,” Violet replied. ‘Are you heading to the capital?’
“No, I’m heading to the mountains,” I replied.
“The mountains? You’re a brave one,” Violet said, bringing her sword to the ground and leaning against it. ‘Perhaps I should test you.’
“Test me? Right here? Right now?” I asked, surprised. I wouldn’t mind a little sparring, but the fact that she seemed ready to do it at that moment startled me.
“Why not? No one cares. People spar all the time. As long as we move from the roads, we’ll be all right,” Violet replied. “Well, are you up to it?”
I took a deep breath and nodded. There was no way I would refuse a sparring challenge — It simply seemed wrong in my eyes. Violet nodded, and the two of us moved away from the streets. The Demi-humans didn’t seem to note our movement. They didn’t even turn toward us when we drew our

weapons. Violet spun her sword about with surprising speed as she steadied it. I gave my spear a single twirl before pointing its sharpened blade at Violet. We stared at each other for a minute, watching the other for sudden moves.

Then, suddenly, Violet rushed forward, sword raised above her head. I swiftly leapt into the air, dodging her attack and rising about her. I spun my spear about, aiming it for Violet's shoulder. Violet landed on the ground and looked up at me. I threw my spear downward, aiming for her shoulder.

Violet leapt out the way with agility I had never seen before in a human. My spear slammed into the ground, and its blade drove deep into the dirt. I landed beside it, but was quickly pushed to the ground by Violet, who had rushed forward with incredible speed, speed even Burmecians barely had. It became clear to me that Violet was not a normal human. I rolled to my feet and grabbed my spear. I yanked it from the ground and just managed to block an attack from Violet. She attacked with surprising force, and she managed to push me back. I stumbled on my feet, but managed to keep my footing as I concentrated. My spear brimmed with white energy, and I rushed forward to slash Violet. Violet leapt out of the way and slammed the handle of her sword into my chest. I fell to the ground, gasping for

breath. Violet put the tip of her sword at my throat.
“You have the speed,” she said. “But not the skill. You are not ready for the mountains.”
Before I could question her, Violet vanished in a flash of lightning. I stared at the spot where she had once been, the ground smoldering slightly from the lightning. I quickly rose to my feet, but she was no where. Violet had disappeared.
Yet the flash of lightning gave me an idea of where she would be. Putting my spear away, I once again headed toward the Thunder Mountains.

The Thunder Mountains were mysterious when far away. When up close, they were ominous, especially when combined with the Orca River.
The Orca River never even went into the mountain range; it slid right by it, meandering its way toward the ocean. Regardless, it was dangerous. Massive rocks, probably having fallen from the mountains during past mountain slides, had lodged themselves in the river. The rapids were rough, the water white with the constant churning. It rushed through its bank with a rapid fierceness, and any creature that made a single false move would surely perish, either by drowning or by meeting one of the rocks.
As for the mountains, they didn’t look any more inviting. Despite being the smallest mountain range

on the continent, the mountains were jagged and probably the tallest and most dangerous. They were sleek black, as if made entire of charcoal, with silver and white rocks mixed in between. The highest tips were white, but most of the range was not covered in snow. Dark storm clouds hovered above the mountains and lightning shot out of the clouds. It looked ominous, but a voice suddenly came to my head.

Come to me.

I stood rigid, hand ready to grab my spear, but the voice was quickly gone. It resembled a scary resemblance to Violet's voice. Yet at the same time, it was hauntingly tempting, as if promising me something that I truly wanted. I took a deep breath, allowing myself to relax slightly. I then headed off toward the mountain range.

The climb up the mountains soon proved itself to be tough. Most mountain ranges come slowly, the land slowly uplifting from flatness, to foothill, to high foothills, to the actual mountains. The Thunder Mountains chose to go from flat ground to sudden high foothills that were so steep you had to crane your neck to find the top. Regardless, I pushed on. By now, I was the only one around. I had long left the flat plains, and it was clear no one bothered scaling these mountains often.

It took around an hour to finally get to the top of the foothill I had chosen to scale. I was exhausted enough from endless climbing, but I couldn't help but hold my breath when I saw what was in front of me.

There they were, less than a mile away. The Thunder Mountains rose suddenly from the foothills, which rolled up and down until finally they became a plateau that held the mountains. The mountains were massive and steep, rising suddenly into the air and ending in jagged tips. There were a few mountains that appeared climbable, and they seemed to help lead to the steeper mountains. It was the oddest mountain range I had come upon.

Yet there was no way I could reach it at that moment. With a soft sigh, I sat down, trying to catch my breath to reach the next big step. A bird flew by, chirping softly. I noted that the rain had stopped, though there were still black clouds in the sky. The land was so dry it seemed to crumple at the slightest touch. Trees had become sparse, and those I did see looked dead. The land was becoming a wasteland.

"Been some time."

I leapt to my feet at hearing the voice. It was clearly masculine, with a neutral rather than hostile tone. It sounded nearby. I looked around, confused, until I saw a figure. The figure was dressed in heavy furs

with dark, long boots. His hands were exposed to reveal long-nailed hands. He had black hair, and black eyes. His skin was so pale, he reminded me of the vampires I had heard about in children's tales. He had almost a spooky, ominous appearance, though he simply stayed where he was and watched me.

"No one bothers to come here anymore," the man said. 'They don't want to risk the storm and the high peaks. It's an adventurer's dream, this land. It's a miner's paradise.'

"Who are you?" I asked before the man could continue.

The man did not seem annoyed at my interruption, like I had expected. Instead, he snorted as he walked a foot closer.

"You don't need to know that. You just need to know this. What you seek in the mountains may not be worth the trip or the ruler that resides," the man said.

"Just answer my question. Who are you?" I asked, getting annoyed.

"You will be a legend if you live… Better think of a fancy name quick," the man said sarcastically. 'As for my name, what do rivers do?'

"Flow," I replied automatically.

"No, idiot, they meander," the man replied. "Good

luck, you'll need it."
Then, suddenly, the man disappeared, leaving me very confused. Meander? That was his name? And why did he seem to think I wasn't ready?
Don't worry about him… Just come…
The voice had come again, as persistent as ever. I turned toward the mountains once again, thinking over the man's, supposedly Meander, words. He had said that it may not be worth the trip, and that I would become a legend — It seemed like too much. The mountains looked dangerous, yes, but that bad? I didn't feel they were that serious. So, with a deep breath, I resumed my trip to the mysterious mountains.

I think that when Meander said it was dangerous, he was talking about the weather.
As I approached the massive mountains, the weather became increasingly worse. Lightning began to streak from the sky as the wind picked up. I expected rain to develop, but it never came. It was a lightning storm, nothing more. Regardless, it was fierce. I soon found myself dodging lightning bolts while trying to fight a maddening wind. The mountains rose higher and higher, and I was so busy trying to survive the weather that I didn't notice as I began to climb one of the less steep mountains that I

was within the actual range.
I did notice, however, when a lightning bolt struck a massive rock in front of me and shattered it into pieces. I immediately slammed into the ground, curling into a tight ball in an attempt to escape the sharp rocks that flew in all directions from the force of the hit. The wind only helped the rocks to fly. Only after I had heard every rock hit the ground did I rise to my feet. I looked around, and saw myself to be directly in the Thunder Mountains. Sleek black rock that appeared to be obsidian mixed with coal, slate, and other hard, black rocks surrounded me. The clouds above me were almost completely black, with bright lightning slashing between the clouds. The wind was fierce, but it blew nothing toward me. There was no vegetation, no animals, just the rock and the storm. It was a desolate place.
I wandered on, keeping wary of the unpredictable weather and the yellow eyes that looked at me from holes in the rock. I continued on my complicated hike, looking around for a way to get to one of the steeper mountains.
Then I heard a roar, a powerful roar that seemed to be mixed with the sound of the lightning itself. It seemed to reverberate throughout the entire range, and it made the ground shake. I stopped in my tracks and took out my spear. I then looked around, trying

to locate the roar's source.

It came to me on its own. Suddenly a huge form swooped overhead, massive black wings flapping to keep the form airborne. Lightning streaked over the black form's body, lighting up so it was easily seen. It swooped in a 90-degree turn before it landed on a massive rock in front of me and stared at me with black eyes that held a yellow lightning bolt within them.

It was a dragon, and a beautiful one at that. It had a small head in comparison to its body, with a short, wide snout that ended in high nostrils that were spitting out steam as the dragon breathed. No teeth showed through its snout, making me wonder if it had any. Its horns were small and not straight; instead, they curved about until they were facing opposite directions, the left one curving to the left, the right one curving to the right. It had a long body, at least ten feet long at a rough estimation without the tail, with a long, whip-like tail that probably added another six feet. It had a long neck that added to its body length, being around four feet long, allowing the body to be six feet long. It had muscular legs ending in powerful, bird-like feet equipped with a three-foot long talon on each of its four toes. Its wing span had to be at least eleven feet long, and though black, the wing membrane was

close to being transparent. The end of the wing ended in a sharp spike. The dragon was completely black, and lightning circled its body, the lightning's bright yellow features lighting up the dragon and sending a charge outward from time to time.

As I stared in awe, the dragon snorted and lifted itself onto its strong-looking hind legs. It folded its wings outward, as if showing off to me, who felt petty in comparison to it.

"Welcome. I see you listened to my call, but didn't heed my advice," the dragon said, and it held a feminine voice — The same voice as Violet, yet the same as the voice I had heard in my head.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Why, simple, Burmecian. I told you to come in dream and in mind, yet I came to you myself and tested you, then concluded you were not ready," the dragon said, lowering her head and body to stare at me right in the eye.

"You — You are Violet!" I gasped.

"My human-form — a form I barely take — is Violet. This form, my true form, is not Violet. My name is Relámpago. I am the Thunder Dragon, and the ruler of these parts," the dragon announced.

"You're a pretty cruel ruler, then," I said, recovering from first seeing the dragon.

"I'm not cruel, the weather is. I love this place,

personally, but you do not," Relámpago snorted, rising back onto her hind legs. 'You have come, so I will announce. I am here to test you, to teach you what you must know, and to help you, believe it or not. Meander has already told you that you will be a legend if you manage to win the battle.'
"It is true?" I asked.
"Of course. But if we fight, there are rules."
"Rules?" I immediately was suspicious as I readied my lance.
"Not rules. Winning conditions. If you win, you become a legend, I tell you what you need to know, and I send you in the right direction. If I win, you're dead."
"But you don't die."
"Of course not."
"That doesn't seem exactly fair."
Relámpago chuckled bitterly, lowering her front legs back onto the rock as she stared at me intently. "Life isn't fair, boy. That's one lesson I'm here to teach you. If you're going to survive, you'd best be used to not-so-fair conditions. So are you ready for it?"
I spun my spear around, aiming it for the dragon's muscular chest. "Does it matter if I am or not?"
"No, it doesn't. You learn quick."
Relámpago leapt forward and slammed into the ground, making me lose my footing and fall to the

ground. She roared again, making the ground shake and the lightning stop flashing for a few moments. I rose to my feet and watched as she stared at me intently. Then, suddenly, she was moving in a blur — And her wide jaw was open, revealing black, sharp fangs.

——— Bwahahahaha! Cliffhanger! After you waited so long for me to get my act together, I give you a cliffhanger! Mwahahahaha!

I won't bother apologizing for the delay… I'm tired of making excuses… I'll try to update more quickly.

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Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Seventeen
Advice of Elements

I was shocked by Relámpago's sudden rush; I had never fought a dragon before, and their speed was amazingly lightning-quick compared to what I was used to. Regardless, I moved swiftly. I leapt into the air, propelling myself high into air, yet managing to avoid the stormy clouds. Relámpago's jaws snapped shut with an audible click below me. She snorted softly, lifting her head to stare directly at me. I was slowing down, but my spear was aimed directly for her jaw. The very second she opened it, I would throw.

Relámpago seemed to understand this, for she did not open her maw. She instead leapt into the air and reached for me with a strong foot with sharp talons. Quickly I spun my spear and tossed it at the center of her foot. The spear slammed into her foot, piercing it deeply and causing the dragon to scream with pain. Meanwhile, I began a steady fall toward the ground. Relámpago slammed into the ground, and a snap filled the air. The dragon lifted her foot, revealing that my spear had snapped completely in

half from the force of the drop. She lifted her other foot and began to pick at the spear with a sharp talon, trying to dislodge the tip. Meanwhile, I landed on the ground only a few feet away from her.

My spear would be useless now, but I knew I could still keep up a fight. I lifted my hand to the stormy sky and took a deep breath, praying that it would still work.

“Power of the heavens, send the dragon’s breath!” I shouted as loud as I could.

Energy seemed to travel within the very earth. Warmth flushed the ground below me, causing my feet to feel as if they were on fire. Then, suddenly, right before me appeared a dragon head, pinkish in color and spiritual in looks. Three-inch sharp horns protruded from just above unseen eyes. It opened its thin, powerful maw and spat a powerful spray of fire at Relámpago, who hissed angrily. Relámpago shifted her massive body as if to prepare to leap, but the fire soon hit her, throwing her off— track. She tried to jump, but the fire seemed to be too great, and she fell to the ground, pain-filled growls coming from her maw. I rushed forward, aiming for the foot that had my spear still jammed within in. Perhaps, I felt, it could still make a good throwing weapon.

Suddenly Relámpago shifted to her feet, causing me to screech to a quick stop. With a snarl, Relámpago

lifted the foot that had my spear within it and moved to strike me with it. I quickly leapt out of the way, then leapt again. Soon I was hanging from one of Relámpago's talons. The dragon snorted and moved her foot to fling me off, but I had already leapt off the dragon's talon and was hanging from the jagged piece of wood that remained of my spear's handle. Implanting both feet against the dragon's foot and on either side of the spear, I got a firm grip, and yanked just as the dragon moved her foot downward to squish me between the ground and her foot.

It worked. My spear ripped from the dragon's foot in an explosion of blood and flesh. The dragon screamed while I got showed with her red blood. The blood sent a jolt of electricity through me the minute it touched me, and I was sent flying back first into a rock. I landed on my knees, my snapped spear beside me, its sharp silver tip stained red. I rose shakily to my feet to find Relámpago with her snout toward the air, electricity gathering at her mouth. Her foot was bleeding from a massive gash in the center. I watched with awe as the lightning from the storm gathered at Relámpago's mouth, making the electricity gathering only look deadlier.

Suddenly Relámpago's head lowered to have her maw facing me directly. The lightning shot from her mouth and in my direction. Automatically I leapt to

the right, but a lightning bolt managed to strike my soaring body. The electricity shot through my body and sent me slamming to the ground. Just as quickly as it had shot through my blood, the electricity was gone, leaving me in a half-daze on the ground.

A roar brought me back to reality, and before I was even truly alert, I was on my feet and watching Relámpago slam her open maw into the ground and snap her maw shut. The dragon came up with a mouthful of dirt, and I wasn't included in it. With a snort and a cough, Relámpago spat the dirt out in choked gasps. I lifted my snapped spear and made careful aim, praying I was better at throwing than I had once been.

I tossed the spear the way you would a javelin, sending it soaring toward Relámpago's neck. The dragon turned her head toward me, and soon located me, but not the javelin. It slammed straight into her upper neck. Relámpago screamed, thrashing about. Her tail whipped outward, and I just managed to leap away before it slammed into me. Relámpago continued to thrash about until my spear suddenly dislodged and slammed into my left shoulder tip-first. With a startled yelp I fell onto my back.

After ten seconds I grabbed my spear and carefully pulled it from my shoulder. I rose shakily to my feet, only to have Relámpago's jaws graze my head,

leaving shallow yet painful cuts while tearing out some hair. I leapt backward seven feet and away from Relámpago's deadly jaws. Relámpago hissed angrily, moving so her entire body was facing me. Her neck was bleeding, red rivers of blood trickling steadily down her long neck. My shoulder was in pain and kept me from being able to use my left arm; though I was not skilled with it, I knew I would have to try fighting with my right hand.

With an angry hiss and spit of steam from her nostrils, Relámpago leapt forward, jaws parted and revealing black teeth. Immediately I leapt in the air and away from the charge. Relámpago's wings spread to their full span and gave a powerful flap. Soon, Relámpago's body shifted upward, and she was flying after me, mouth open, and electricity gathering at it. I took a deep breath as I stared into the dragon's black eyes.

"Power of the heavens, send the cherry blossoms of hope!" I shouted, my speech coming out in a quick slur of words.

Regardless of the confusing sound of my words, a dragon spirit, identical to the dragon head that had come before, swirled around Relámpago's massive body, leaving gorgeous red petals in its path. Soon these petals exploded in a fiery mass, catching Relámpago's wings ablaze and causing the

membrane to burn away. With a startled growl, Relámpago fell toward the ground. With little accuracy and a poor throw, I managed to send my spear down into her shoulder with my right hand. With a massive –crash-, Relámpago fell to the ground. She rolled over onto her wounded shoulder, and I heard a distinct snap as my already-broken spear snapped once again. As I fell toward the ground, I couldn’t help but groan as I thought about my spear. Now I knew I wouldn’t be able to use it.

My feet soon touched the ground, and just as I steadied myself, I was being tossed in the air by Relámpago’s sudden throw. It took me a few seconds to register severe pain in my right leg, and I realized with a sudden yet calm horror that Relámpago had grabbed and snapped my leg, then tossed me into the air with hopes to swallow me. This was beginning to become a very desperate and hopeless fight.

Relámpago rose onto strong hind legs and lifted her neck upward. Regardless of my near helplessness, I managed to kick Relámpago’s jaw as it rose to swallow me. The dragon snorted, sending a mass of warm steam in my direction. I kicked her again, even as I began to slow to a stop. Relámpago gave her head a massive shake, snorting. I kicked her again, but this time I dug my claws into her snout. I

swung toward the dragon's neck, grabbed, and managed to get a firm grip, by luck, on a edge of a scale that was just below a scale that had been torn away. Soon I was hanging by one hand on Relámpago's neck.

Relámpago clearly was annoyed. She tried to get me with her jaws, but I was to high up for her jaws to reach. Lowering herself to all fours, Relámpago hissed and lifted her healthy fore paw to smack me away. Unfortunately for her, her neck was too long. She moved to lower it, but by that point, I had managed to leap onto the other side of Relámpago's neck, only making things worse for her, as she couldn't reach me.

I slid down Relámpago's long neck and soon landed squashed between her broad shoulders. On my left was my spear, nothing more than an inch of wood and a tip buried within her shoulder. I half-crawled, half-limped over to it. I placed my right hand against the small piece of wood that remained and got a tight grip.

That was when Relámpago suddenly reared upward, realizing where I was. I was about to fall, when the spear kept me from falling. At first I was suspended in the air, eyes closed with terror. Then I heard a rip, then a scream, and then I felt myself fall. When I opened my eyes, I found myself falling, with a

bloody spear (or what remained of it) falling with me.

I didn't waste time. I slammed my spear into the dragon's body as it flashed before my eyes. Only moments later, Relámpago was back on the ground belly-first. I landed on her once more, my hand still gripped tightly to the little piece of wood that was once a handle. I gave my head a shake and tried to realize what I had hit. I soon concluded I had hit Relámpago's upper side.

With a shaky breath, I moved myself in a sitting position. I then took the spear, steadied my grip, then leapt across Relámpago's back. At first it felt like the spear would break again. Then it gave up, and slid along with me, tearing out scales and leaving a long, bloody cut along Relámpago's back. Relámpago roared and lifted her tail. Having guessed this, I let go of my spear and allowed myself to roll straight off Relámpago and onto the snow-covered ground. I heard Relámpago slam her own tail into her back, having not known I had rolled over. She snarled angrily as she turned her long neck to face me. I stared into her black eyes, breathing heavily. She hissed angrily, sending steam into my face. We stared at each other for a long time.

"Power of the heavens, lend the power to vanquish," I muttered softly, lifting my right hand.

The clouds above me moved aside, revealing the bluish moon that was once hidden underneath. Energy began to gather quickly in a star-shape above the palm of my head. Relámpago moved to strike, but before she even got close, the star-shape rushed outward and slammed into her eye. Relámpago's head snapped upward as she screamed. I rolled out of the way as her neck flew downward and soon slammed into the ground.

Seconds passed as we were still, Relámpago growling softly, I panting to try and catch my breath. Then Relámpago suddenly lifted her head, and for a panic-filled second I thought it was not over.

"You are an amazing fighter," Relámpago said. Her voice sounded filled with exhaustion, unlike the powerful voice I had heard before. "Nothing stops you. You are only fit to be a legend."

I stared at Relámpago as she rose shakily to her feet and padded toward me slowly. I rose into a sitting position, wincing slightly with pain. Soon, we were only two feet away from each other.

"Are you, per chance, saying—" I began in a tired voice.

"You hold the strength of a true warrior. You fight with exceptional skill, even when most of your resources are depleted. I know not why you could not defeat me in human form, but in my dragon form

— my strongest form — you excelled. You will be a legend, an honorable warrior, from now on, Fratley. Be surprised not when your name is known everywhere," Relámpago said, making me stare with shock. 'You are a powerful warrior, Fratley. And you have a will as tough as iron… Do not be surprised if you have a new name suddenly — Iron-tail Fratley.'

"You're confusing me," I muttered. "Are you saying that I won? And that I will be legendary?"

"You learn quick. Yes, Iron-tail, that is exactly what I am saying," Relámpago said, lowering herself. "And now you will receive my advice. First, believe in your heart and your future."

Relámpago suddenly roared at the sky. Lightning shot down from the sky again, the lightning storm that had stopped during our fight now resuming. One lightning bold shot down and struck me. I felt no pain, however, only relief. My vision was blinded by white light, and I felt numb. When it all passed, my wounds were completely healed, and I no longer felt exhaustion. Relámpago was also completely healed; it seemed a lightning bolt had hit her too.

"Second, what you seek is across a grand journey. Go to the place of fame and fortune, and seek the man whose name describes the way of rivers. He can lead you in the right direction. Third, once having received the gifts of fame, head toward the greatest

challenge. This challenge will hold a man to test your strength, a man of demon and human descendant. His intelligence is high, as is his skill in a sword and magic — He will be your best test. All this will lead you to that day when Eoroqu will not be in hiding — Then you leave and go to your goal in the city of Alexander," Relámpago finished.

I took a deep breath and leapt to my feet, thinking things over. So I was to go to the City of Fame, and meet Meander? I couldn't see what that would accomplish. And who was this man with demon and human descendant? A demon-human hybrid? It had to be. And how could he prepare me for Beatrix? How could this journey take six months?

"Do you know what to do?" Relámpago asked.

I nodded, understanding. "Yes, but I have no weapon."

"You will find a way to live. You have it in you, Iron-tail," Relámpago said.

I nodded again, somehow used to the name "Iron-tail" already. I felt as if I had matured in a single battle, and perhaps I had. Or perhaps this feeling was also a result of being with the Dari and in Eoroqu… Whatever it was, it was a good feeling. I looked up at Relámpago, who was watching me with black eyes.

"I will be going now. I thank you for the battle — It

had taught me much. I wish you farewell," I said, bowing briefly.
"Go," Relámpago said, jerking her head in the direction that I had originally come. "Go now."
I didn't waste any more time. With a deep breath, I walked away, and headed out of the Thunder Mountains, leaving Relámpago behind me.

Nervousness clogged my mind as four hours travel had me completely out of the Thunder Mountains and into the Aregui Plains once more. I took a deep breath, looking around. The rainstorm was still continuing, leaving mud puddles in various places. Night had descended, and very few Demi—humans were now on the road. In the distance, I could see dark figures moving — Monsters, though of what type, and what they actually were, I could not say. All I could tell myself was that they were dangerous.
Go on, said Relámpago, as her familiar voice filled my mind. This is just one stretch of your life before you, ready to lead you to greatness. One road, Iron-tail. Your great fight will spread, and fame will come to you. But now is the time to show that you are not just skilled and lucky, but extremely skilled, and having luck play only a very small part. Go on. Show Eoroqu who you are, and prepare to show the

Mist Continent and your unmet villain the same.
I took a deep breath and let it come out in a soft sigh. I looked around, and soon noted the lights of a city only a few miles away. Yet between those miles were monsters and darkness.
“Let fear propel you forward,” I whispered to myself nervously, trying to regain confidence. “Do not let fear stifle you.”
The words implanted themselves in my mind, and it seemed like good enough advice. With another deep breath, I began to run straight toward the burning lights of the city miles away.

Perhaps it was luck, or maybe my own supposedly now “famed” skill. Whatever it was, I didn’t meet any monsters on my run. Soon, I had reached the amazing city of Aregua, the capital of Eoroqu itself. Massive stone walls surrounded the city, large torches burning from holders situated four feet away from each other. The stone had been carved smooth. Two massive gates were on opposite sides of the wall, one facing south, and another facing north. I happened to be near the southern gate. I could see the silhouettes of Demi-human guards with large spears near the gate. I approached slowly. Soon a guard shifted, and I could see his spear pointed at my throat.

“Who goes there?” he asked in a gruff voice, and I could see his eyes, cat-like eyes, glinting in the torchlight. “’Tis Sir Iron-tail Fratley of Burmecia,” I called in a non-threatening tone. ‘I wish to enter the city. I am unarmed.’

I watched as the guard lowered his spear. He muttered something to his companion. They walked over to a crank on either side of the crank. Among grunting and a lot of labor, they turned the cranks and lifted up the massive iron gates. To make sure they didn’t have much work to do, I swiftly passed under the gate. Behind me, the cranks spun wildly as the two guards allowed the gate to close. I, meanwhile, looked around. Torches were hung from stone buildings that were close together. The streets were paved obsidian with intricate designs carved into the shiny black rock. The buildings appeared to be made of a dark stone as well, though I could not tell what kind. A Demi-human guard passed by me, his yellow eyes watching me suspiciously. He was a crocodile Demi, so I chose to keep away from him and begin a steady walk down the main street that led in the direction of a dark, massive building at the other side of the city. “Can I help you sir?” a voice asked suddenly in a snake-like voice.

I turned around to find myself faced with a scaled, strong-looking Demi-human. He held a torch in his

hand, yet I could still only assume that his scales were greenish, and that he had yellow eyes. He had a snake's mouth, with a snake tail, and a relatively human body. He was a snake Demi, and he wore black armor that glinted in the torchlight.
"Yes," I replied immediately. 'Could you please tell me where the inn is?'
"You're on the wrong road, sir," the Demi-human said. "The inn is on the left-center road, the seventh building on your right." He continued to drag out S's, C's, and Th.'s.
"Thank you, sir," I said, and quickly turned around.
I took a right turn, then headed down the first road I found that headed down the center of town. There appeared to be no one on this road. I headed down, counting the buildings, until I came upon a sign. It was made of wood and hanging from an iron post. Painted upon it was a six— headed red dragon with flailing heads spitting fire. Painted in gold around the dragon were the word's "Hydra's Den". Glinting within the windows of the building beside the sign were candles.
I walked over to the wooden door and carefully pushed it open. I found myself in a small dim-lit room. Two couches of an unknown color were set up right in front of large windows with what appeared to be red curtains. Two candles each were set at the

two windows. The floor was wooden, but red (or at least they looked to be red) carpets were set up at the two couches, and in front of a wooden desk. On the wooden desk were two more candles, a massive book, and a wooden plate propped up, with a chisel beside it. A wolf Demi, with a wolfish face, green eyes, gray, white-tipped fur, and a bushy tail, was watching me with a small smile.

“Good evening. Staying for the night?” the Demi-human asked.

I nodded and walked over to the desk. It took up a very small space and was probably only the size of the couches. I reached into my pocket, and was surprised to find I had not lost any money. I took out my pouch.

“It’s 150 Gil,” the Demi-human supplied.

I gave the Demi-human the right amount of Gil. He took the Gil and dropped it to the ground. I heard the Gil clang against something, and guessed it to be a pot.

“What is your name?” the Demi-human asked, taking a quill and dipping it in ink.

“Iron-tail Fratley,” I replied.

The Demi-human quickly wrote my name down, though he spelled “Fratley” incorrectly. He then took the wooden plate, and made a short mark with the chisel. He then smiled at me and motioned to a door

in the east wall.
“You’re all set. Have a good night,” the Demi-human said.
I nodded my thanks, then headed over to the east door and opened it carefully. I found myself in another dim-lit halfway covered in red carpets. I padded down the hall, looking at the doors that were lined up against the walls. Most of them had a small ribbon tied to the doorknob. Soon, I found one with no ribbon. I opened the door and found the room empty. It was fairly large, with plenty of room to move around. In the center of the floor was a red carpet. Against the wall opposite the door was a large window with red curtains. Three candles were lined up next to each other on the windowsill, helping to light the room. Next to the window was a large bed with red sheets and white pillows. A wooden endtable with a lit candle was next to the bed. There was a large bureau next to the door, and two lit candles were on top of it. Also on top of the bureau was a red ribbon. The room had smooth white walls, and a very homey appearance.
I took the red ribbon and tied it to the doorknob facing the hallway. I then closed the door. I then padded over to the bed and sat down on it. Quickly, exhaustion came to me. Running for miles on end had exhausted me and taken away the energy I had

regained after the fight with Relámpago. I lied down the bed, but soon found a need for covers as the cold of the room settled in on me. Within a few moments I was comfortable. After six months with the Dari, a bed seemed odd, yet comfortable all the same.
Soon, I had fallen asleep.

I was awoken the next day was rays of light filtering through the open windows. I woke up quickly and yawned lazily. I rose into a sitting position, and was surprised to see all candles no longer lit, and a small note by my desk. I picked up the note, and quickly read it. It simply explained that breakfast would be in the main hall, and that breakfast would be a series of meats, breads, fruits, and sweets. It appeared that the breakfast would cost nothing. I rose from the bed and padded out of the room, making sure to leave the ribbon on the bureau. I soon found my way to the main hall by following the hallway to its end. The main hall was massive, with a spectacular wooden floor and smooth stone walls. Red banners hung from the walls. There were huge full-length windows set up in various places along the walls. Massive wooden tables were set up in the middle of the room, with eight chairs for each table. Longer wooden tables had been set up along the west fall, and they were piled with food, plates,

utensils, cups, and drinks. I quickly padded over to the table, and was surprised to see not just Eoroqu foods, but also foods that I recognized from the Mist Continent, and foods that I didn't know in general. Despite being an inn, the Hydra's Den had quite a selection. I took what I was used to, which was nothing more than sweet muffins, cheese, and a little bit of meat, then took a cup and filled it was herbal tea. I sat down at a table and began to eat. As I did, others, mostly Demi-humans, began to filter in. Some humans and Burmecians also filtered in, however. Soon, within five minutes, the room was filled with a flock of people.

I associated with no one, and therefore was quickly able to finish my meal. I left the plates where they were and quickly left the main hall. I dodged people in the hallway, smiled and nodded at the wolf Demi-human who was still at his desk, then headed off into the streets. The torches were all extinguished, and many people were already moving around. I quickly moved into the streets, and was soon lost in the crowd. I began to walk along, and soon saw a sign that read "Goods of Life — Get All You Need to Survive". Interested, I entered the building that the sign was next to. I found myself in a large room that had a stone floor and walls, and large tables set up with many goods set up. A human with short

black hair, blue eyes, and a short yet strong build was serving other customers. I explored the shop, and soon picked up a few potions, bandages, a tent, and a new pack. It cost me 2500 Gil, but I left fairly satisfied. I once again headed out into the streets.

This time, I stopped at what appeared to be a weapon's shop. Inside, the wooden building had weapons of many types hanging from the wall. An eagle Demi-human ran this shop, and he quickly helped me pick out a spear similar to the one I had lost in the fight with Relámpago. It cost me 1000 Gil, and I found myself to be running short. I could only afford a few more items.

I quickly left the shop with my new spear and headed off once more. As I padded down the street, I came closer and closer to the castle, which had been the dark, massive building I had seen in the night. It was black, with white stripes and many pillars and statues. I could not identify many features, but anyone could tell that it was huge and splendid.

"Hey."

I stopped at hearing the voice, directed at me. I soon saw a cat Demi-human. She had long, black hair with peach skin and blue, cat-like eyes. She had a black furry tail, and wore a simple brown outfit. She motioned for me to follow her, and I swiftly did. She led me to a building, and we entered it. I found

myself to be in a small shop with a wooden floor, stone walls, and many medical supplies set about.
“Shop. I can tell you’ll need a lot of it,” the Demi said, watching me calmly.
I quickly picked out antidotes for many ailments, healing salve, more efficient bandages, and powerful potions. It cost me 3500 Gil, and left me with only 500. Regardless, I felt satisfied with what I had bought. Thanking the cat Demi, I left the shop and headed for the northern gate. I soon arrived at it, and found it to be wide open. I stepped through with ease, and soon found myself to be faced with the wilderness.
It was time to continue. I knew where I had to go. I looked in the direction of Illiad Forest, its dark green trees clearly visible despite the distance between it and Aregua. Beyond that forest, I knew, was Tessaih, the City of Fame, and my next destination. From there, I would meet Meander. What would continue, I didn’t know, but I knew that Relámpago would not lead me in the wrong direction. Or at least I prayed.
With a deep breath, I headed off in the direction of Illiad Forest.

——————— Long, looooooong chapter, heh. That should keep you satisfied until I finish the next

one ;)

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Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Eighteen
Maze of Emotions

The trip to Tessaih took much longer than I expected. I completely avoided the Illiad Forest by going around it, which may have slowed me down. The true culprit who hindered me, however, had to be the massive thunderstorm that suddenly rolled in from the Liosa Mountains. I was stranded over a few miles away from Uma, a small town near a massive lake. In the distance I could see the massive gates that surrounded Tessaih, my destination.

At last the storm left, leaving the ground muddy and wet, yet the skies clear and the weather fair. Soon I was moving again, and within two days of traveling through muddy territory, I reached the front gate of Tessaih.

Tessaih was known to be the richest city on Eoroqu, and for good reason. Famous people lived in the city and paid a high price to live there. People visiting paid a high price to visit. Because of the expensive prices, Tessaih made plenty of money, and therefore could afford expensive things. The font and back gates — the front facing the ocean and now unseen

Mist Continent, and the back facing the Liosa mountains — were made of pure silver. The tall walls, at least fifteen feet high, were made of strong steel mixed with silver. Massive spikes around three feet high topped the edges of the walls, making getting into the city by the walls nearly impossible. Patrolling the massive gates were four humans dressed in black and yellow uniforms. They rode gorgeous, armored chocobos and held wooden staves. They were the Black Knights, the police force of Tessaih and its neighbors.

As I approached the massive gates, a Black Knight turned his gaze onto me. Then, without questioning, he turned the one massive crank that opened the gates. The gates slowly opened, and I quickly stepped into the city. The streets were paved silver, and the first building I saw was a stone building, looking plain, yet decorated with black and yellow banners. Many buildings were lined up alongside each other, most of them made of stone. Many people walked through the streets, some Demi-humans, some humans, and some Burmecians. I walked forward and looked around, but could see nothing easily through the huge crowds.

“Over here.”

The voice sounded very familiar. I looked around, and soon spotted a familiar face. Meander stood

nearby, watching me quietly. Without another word, he motioned for me to follow him, and began heading down the east road. I quickly followed him, somehow not losing him in the massive crowd.

Soon, a small building came into view. Unlike the other buildings, which were made of white stone, it was pitch black, and clearly made of basalt. The door was made of a dark mahogany. Massive windows covered the east wall. The door was open, and people were seen inside the building, which had a black floor and black walls inside. There was clearly a second floor, but no windows on it. Meander entered the building, and I quickly followed.

Inside, thousands of wooden trays had been hammered into a wooden strip along the stone wall. Inside the trays were thousands of carved jewels of many kinds. I saw opals, emeralds, sapphires, rubies, and even diamonds. There were also wooden tables that held necklaces, bracelets, and rings made of silver or gold and containing many jewels. Many people, most of them looking very rich, were examining the many jewels and jewelry. Meander ignored them and instead headed through a closed wooden door and into a small room. He allowed me in, then closed the door.

The room was cramped, with two small chairs, and a

small wooden table containing knives, cutters, and many other things used to carve gems. Meander sat down at the table and eyed me with black eyes.
“So you made it here, eh? Defeated Relámpago. I’m impressed,” Meander grunted nonchalantly.
“What am I here for?” I asked.
“To learn a thing or two before you go after your test,” Meander replied. “First, I’m going to advance your skills with some of the best. Second, I’m going to make you a new weapon. Finally, you’re going to fight me.”
I stared with surprise. Meander rose to his feet. He held up his long-nailed hand and muttered something in the grunts and growls of the demon language. A red haze appeared in his hand. I stared at Meander suspiciously. Just as quickly as the red haze appeared, however, it was gone.
“You’re going to learn a few demon techniques,” Meander grunted. ‘Since you’re a Dragon Warrior, I expect you to learn quickly.’
“Demon techniques?” I gasped. “Only demons have the ability to learn those.”
“The most powerful, yes. The weaker ones, no. Combine the weaker ones with a few Dragon attacks and you’ll have some good attacks on your hands,” Meander grunted. ‘First, though, you have to learn the demon language.’

“What?” I asked with shock. “How am I supposed to do that?”
“It’s not that hard,” Meander snapped. ‘Pay attention. I’m going to be your teacher. We have a lot to accomplish, and I don’t care how long it takes.’
“What is your estimation?”
“I’d say a year and a half to do it all. It will take quite some time for you to learn the language, a little longer for you to learn the techniques, and who-knows-how-long for you to defeat me in battle.” Meander paused there, his black eyes narrowing as he started at me. “But it’s up to you. Will you stay with me for that long, in this accursed city?”
I moved my gaze to the ground, thinking over the offer. Meander seemed like he wanted to help me, and indeed, he most likely did. But I didn’t approve of a year and a half wait to learn all that would be required. Yet it seemed like I had no choice. I looked up, and found Meander’s black eyes staring right at me, as if into my soul. I took a deep breath and nodded slowly. Meander smiled very slightly.
“Good to hear,” he said quietly. “Now, why don’t you go do a little exploring? Get used to the city; you’ll want to.”
With a nod, I turned around and left the black building. The crowds were still as fierce as ever, yet

this time I walked with the crowd, staring at all the buildings. One building, a massive building that seemed to have very thick walls and massive, purposeful holes in its roof, caught my attention. Slipping out of the massive crowd, I began a steady walk toward the building. As I approached, the smell of blood came to me, as did growls and snorts. There the entrance to the building was massive, so massive a dragon could probably fit. I entered the building, and immediately found myself staring.

Inside, the entire floor was lined with piles of soft hay. On the hay, romping around, were dragons. Most of them looked young, with their wings too small and their heads too big. They romped about, growling playfully. An especially large dragon, with brilliant green scales, massive horns, and dangerous-looking teeth and claws, watched the dragonlings protectively. One dragonling saw me with its massive yellow eyes. With a mew-like growl, it wobbled toward me, seeming awkward on its small legs.

“Hello,” a voice said, startling me. I turned in its direction and saw a Black Knight watching me. ‘What are you here for?’

“Just looking,” I told him, kneeling down as the dragonling continued to approach.

“Interesting things, aren’t they? Grand Dragons.

Right from Daguerreo. Everyone loves ‘em. Clearly they don’t know how viscous they really are,” the Knight said. “We’ve had Flaming Dragons, Water Dragons, Grand Dragons, even Silver Dragons at one point, though that was many years ago. And despite the danger people jus’ keep buying them.”

I reached my hand out to the dragonling, who stopped approaching and sniffed the air. With a growl it pounced on my hand, digging its sharp teeth into my hand. I flung my hand instinctively and sent the dragonling flying into a giant pile of hay. The adult Grand Dragon growled angrily and made an attempt to fly toward me, but massive chains held her back. The man chuckled.

“Most would’ve considered that cute,” he said, heading toward the back of the room.

“Cute? It tried to bite my hand off,” I muttered.

“Yeah, but the world is full of idiots,” the man said, handing me some bandages. ‘I sell these things for big money, then find out years later that the Dragon was released into the wild after killing someone. Makes me wanna laugh.’

“Why do you sell them, then?” I asked, bandaging my hand.

“Because the public wants ’em anyway,” he said. ‘I’m a Dragon Trainer. I try to train the dragons before the people take ’em, but they don’t listen.

Kisha, the mama who wants to kill ya now, is as tame as a Grand can get. But people think that the babies will be tame too. It's a funny world.'
"What other things do you sell?" I asked.
"I've sold beasts from time to time. Behemoths once. They went quick, and I made a lot of money off of 'em. Thanks to that money I was able to get Kisha. One of my main sells is off of Catoblepas. Don't know why, but people love those things. Mean beasts, though. And I have great experience taming Fangs."
"You're famous for selling wild beasts, aren't you?" I asked.
"Yep," the Knight said. He then smiled. 'Well, if you're goin' to stick around, I guess ya deserve to know my name. I'm Tegre.'
"Iron-tail Fratley," I replied. "Did you ever sell griffins?"
"Yep. Sold 'em with Red Dragons," Tegre replied. He then watched as a few people, clearly nobles, entered the room. I also watched them, wondering if they would be foolish enough to buy a dragon right at that moment.
"I'll leave you now," I told Tegre.
"See you late'," Tegre said, approaching the nobles who were now cooing over the dragonlings.
I turned around and left quickly, looking around the

city quietly. I quickly headed over to the stone building with the black banners. Black Knights guarded the entrance, but when I approached, they let me pass. I found myself in a massive room made completely of stone and containing wooden chairs that I assumed you rested on. The room appeared to be an antechamber of some sort. Only three people besides myself were in the room. One human woman had a long scratch on her arm and had appeared to be beaten. The other two clearly had come together. A man in black was being held by a man who appeared to be a farmer. I assumed the man in black was a criminal who had been unlucky enough to get caught.

The place, however, held little value for me. I left the building, and found myself staring in the direction of Meander's shop and home. I took a deep breath as I realized the reason I had traveled the town. I had been hoping for something different, something more worthwhile than spending who-knew-how-many years with the mysterious Meander. Yet, there was nothing that offered anything better. Meander was my best choice. So, with a sigh, I returned to Meander's shop.

"There's nothing you would like," Meander said the minute I entered.

"How—?" I began, but never finished.

“It’s in your eyes and movement. You’re disappointed,” Meander grunted. ‘Listen. Your cooperation will make this go by quick. I can probably get you out of here within a year, maybe less. But it’ll be harder.’
I took a deep breath, surprised at this information. I then nodded. “I’m ready to do anything. I just want to accomplish my goal.”
“Well then,” Meander said, looking me in the eye with his black emotionless eyes. “Be ready, for we start tomorrow.”
I could immediately tell, by the look in Meander’s eyes, and the tone in his voice, that I had just sworn myself to hard work.

———— Er, I don’t know what to say. Well, except that I want to slap myself for the crappy last sentence in this chapter. Anyway, I’m sorry about slow updates; my computer is not working properly. The Internet and Network are both screwed up, so it takes a long time to get to my stories, and even longer to upload them. I’m trying, though.

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Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Nineteen
Final Challenge, Final Fight

Tessaih was definitely a curious city. The rich people who lived in the city often seemed to look down on the visitors, regardless of who they were. Many times, when trying to enjoy myself while not being taught by Meander, I would be glared at, kicked out of stores, or just basically hated. At one point, a rich warrior agitated me enough to fight; when he was creamed, Meander suggested that I not travel the city, lest I be arrested.

“I didn’t do anything,” I had growled angrily. “He __”

“Do you think I don’t know that?” Meander had snapped. “These days, the Black Knights side with the citizens. So don’t start trouble.”

I decided to heed Meander’s advice. From there on, I would go outside the city to practice my skills, yet things still weren’t the same. Being sixteen, I wanted to talk to someone and have a good conversation at least once in a while, if not everyday. Meander, however, wasn’t one for conversation. So, instead of talking with others, I would often be alone.

That was when I would start to think about my goal, and begin to remember what I had left for, and what I had left behind.

I knew my goal. I knew I wouldn't forget it. Beatrix was a danger to Burmecia. Her low voice, seeming-unforgiving attitude, and her quiet talk when I was around… Quiet threatening talk… It seemed like she was planning something ominous against the Burmecians… An attack. People around Alexandria had spoken of such things too. Attacks, suspicion all of it surrounding Burmecia. No doubt an attack on Burmecia was being planned. And, knowing I was the only one who even suspected such, I felt responsible for stopping or delaying it. Eliminating Beatrix seemed to be the best choice, but only this training would get me to her.

Yet all I had left… When with the Dari, fighting, or travelling, I didn't have much time to think about what I had left behind. Without anyone to talk to, or much to do, I got to do plenty of thinking. I thought about family, friends, and Freya, who was beyond a friend, yet not family.

I had almost forgotten about all of them, and what they had done for me. Rose, with her sarcasm and her wit, Aireff, with his good-natured temper and Dari past, Dan, with his understanding and good humor, and Freya, with her love and sweet heart —

All of them had almost left me, but I began to remember. At first, I couldn't even hear their voices or see them — As the months crawled on, I could hear and see them just as I could when I had first left. And I missed them all. They had all done so much for me, including tolerate my leave.

Now, I knew. I wanted to accomplish my goal quickly now; correctly, but quickly. So, five months after the training had begun, I rose to my feet. I looked out into the distance, looking at the endless sea. Within a month, Eoroqu would rise, and I could return to the Mist Continent. I didn't want to be stuck in Eoroqu much longer.

It was beautiful, and it was unique, but it wasn't home.

I turned around and headed back toward the massive silver gates guarding Tessaih. I was rather shocked, however, when I saw Meander leave the gates. From what I had gathered in my few weeks of socialization, Meander only left the gates when out of supplies, and unable to buy more. I knew he had plenty of supplies, so I didn't understand why Meander was outside.

"Stop moving," Meander called.

Confused, I came to a stop, then asked, "Why?"

"Because you're a quick learner, and it's time you're tested," Meander said, beginning to slowly circle

around me. ‘You’ve mastered the demon language, and you’ve learned the techniques — Or at least the important ones. You worked extremely hard, and now it’s time you fight me.’
“You said it would take a year to accomplish it all!” I declared, startled.
“What can I say? You cooperated more than I thought,” Meander grunted, taking out a mysterious emerald-bladed sword with a silver hilt and rubies within the hilt. “Come on. Enough talk.”
I stared at Meander curiously, surprisingly. He aimed his sword at my throat, watching me calmly, clearly waiting for me to take out my spear, which was safely by my side, lying on the ground. Swiftly I picked it up and held it out in front of me. Realizing I was all too ready, Meander suddenly rushed toward me, sword ready to strike. Quickly I leapt into the air and above him. I soared above the walls of the city, and took a deep breath. Holding my spear above me, I shouted demon words.
My spear “mutated”, gaining two more blades, becoming sharper, and beginning to glow a red haze. I muttered “Meander” under my breath, then sent the spear soaring toward Meander. Meander slammed his sword into the spear to block it. The spear went flying backward, straightened itself, and then went soaring back toward Meander. I watched with slight

amusement while Meander began to fight my spear without me even controlling it.

It was a perfect distraction. Keeping my hand in a throwing position, I muttered, “Power of the heavens, show the power of mighty warriors.”

A dragon symbol appeared under Meander, who had just slammed my spear away from him for the fifth time. Soon he was engulfed in an explosion when a dragon spirit plowed through him. Meanwhile, my spear swerved around in the air and shot toward him. A stream of fire shot came from out of the explosion and shot toward me. It slammed into me and sent me flying painfully to the ground. I leapt to my feet, but only ended up falling back over when my spear’s wooden end slammed straight into my chest. Apparently, it had finally hit Meander, and had decided to return.

Groaning, I rose to my feet, steadying my spear in the process. Quickly, however, I had to get back on the ground and roll out of the way before Meander could skewer me with his sword. I leapt to my feet and blocked another attack he had coming my way. I then slammed my clawed foot into his boot. With a snarl and a curse, he tried to stomp my feet, but only ended up allowing me to shove him to the ground when he had only one foot on the ground. Meander went to rise, but I aimed my spear at his throat.

“When do we end?” I asked.
Meander disappeared into thin air, and I figured the battle didn’t end then. Spinning my spear about, I waited patiently for the man to reappear. To my shock, he reappeared above me, landing on me and squashing me under his heavy body. Quickly I thought of teleportation, and soon I had appeared in the Space World of Teleportation. I gave myself a shake, then headed toward the star that contained the outside of Tessaih. I leapt through it, and soon appeared in the grass.
“You use all your skills well,” Meander grunted, watching me land neatly on my feet.
“You taught me well,” I replied calmly, spinning my spear about. ‘When does the fight end?’
“When one gives up,” Meander said simply, holding his sword up. It began to charge with fire.
I stayed on the ground, sensing something dangerous about the attack. When Meander rushed for me, I leapt in the air. Then, the expected happened — Meander lifted the sword to the air, and the fire gathered on it discharged and slammed into me, sending me flying into the ground once more. I sent my spear backwards, then rolled backwards and to my feet, grabbing my spear on my way up. I avoided a fire attack from Meander in the stunt. Quickly I readied my spear and allowed it to charge

with white energy. I then rushed forward, dodged a burst of demon energy, and stabbed Meander in the shoulder. White energy shot from my spear, making the wound larger. Cursing, Meander tried to smack me, but I had already grabbed my spear and leapt into the air.

I saw Meander mutter something under his breath. I was pretty shocked, however, when a demon spirit shot from the ground and charged toward me, red, hazy mouth open to reveal sharp fangs. Meander had not taught me that one! Then again, he didn't have to teach me everything, nor did he have to be "fair" in this fight.

Such was life, Relámpago would probably tell me.

I teleported in mid-air, causing the demon spirit to miss me by a half-inch. Swiftly I reappeared behind Meander. Grabbing him by the shoulders, I quickly flipped him over me and aimed my spear at his throat. I then held my hand toward him.

"Power of the heavens, send the cherry blossoms of hope," I muttered.

Gorgeous pink flower petals appeared around Meander. When a dragon spirit charged through them, however, they exploded in a viscous inferno. A few moments later, the inferno had cleared and, as expected, Meander had vanished into thin air. Having expected this, I whirled about, thinking he'd

be behind him.
I was very shocked when I was tackled from behind after having turned around. I spun on my feet and stabbed Meander in the shoulder as I fell. I quickly noted that the man looked fairly hurt. I didn't have much time to think about it, however, because suddenly Meander slashed his sword across my knees. With a startled yelp, I rolled out of the way and to my feet, but I quickly realized what Meander had done.
He had disabled many of my agility techniques. Now, if I wanted to keep going, I would have to teleport, or try to cast Reis's Wind in five seconds. I preferred the second, but first I would have to distract Meander.
Meander rushed toward me, and I held out my hand.
"Power of the heavens, lend the power to vanquish!" I shouted, my words coming out in two seconds, making them sound like one word.
A star-shaped energy ball appeared in my hand as the moon appeared in daylight. The energy ball gained energy, and I shot it at Meander. Meander couldn't dodge nor teleport in time, and he was hit. He was sent flying into the air, doing fairly impressive loop-de-loops. While watching the show, I quickly held my spear in the air and muttered ancient words. Many white dragon spirits

surrounded me, sending a soft wind with a pink haze over me. I quickly began to feel my wounds heal themselves — The Reis's Wind had worked.
Meander, meanwhile, had finally managed to rise to his feet. He looked over at me, and his black eyes widened while his fangs were bared.
"Ah, shit, you didn't," he began.
"Didn't do what?" I asked innocently, though I knew what was the trouble.
"Regen," Meander muttered, watching as my wounds continued to heal themselves. 'Crap.'
"You didn't leave me any restrictions," I said calmly, twirling my spear around dully.
"Well, that wouldn't have been a real battle," Meander grunted. He sighed, rising to his full height. "Well, I would give you this battle, but—"
Suddenly a Firaga spell shot from Meander's hands and slammed into me far before I could even notice the spell, let alone react. I fell to the ground and rolled a few feet before managing to rise to my feet.
"I still have many tricks," Meander grunted.
"As do I," I muttered. I decided to try something new — Something Ebon said was impossible.
"Power of the heavens, send the skill of mighty warriors!" I shouted.
Power of the heavens, send the cherry blossoms of hope, I did my best to think at the same time.

It worked. While a dragon symbol appeared beneath Meander's feet, he was showered by pink petals. Two dragon spirits rammed through him, and two explosions nailed him. I watched the spectacle with shock, wondering how useful this could be.

Soon the explosions cleared, and Meander was on his knees, panting. He looked over at me with surprise, and I stared at him coolly.

"Okay," he gasped. 'Even I can't do that. You're the victor.'

I blinked with shock. "You're not even going to try to retaliate?"

"And allow myself to get fried further, maybe with a Dragon and Demon ability? I'm not going to risk my hide," Meander grunted. I noted that his skin was peeling, revealing more skin. 'If you want you can stay, but I'm sure you want to leave. So if you're leaving, go gather your stuff, and good luck against Julius.'

"Thank you," I said quickly, heading back toward Tessaih casually.

"What are you thanking me for? I didn't let you win!" Meander spat.

I ignored him as I looked up at Tessaih's walls. The Black Knights didn't seem to care that Meander and I had just battled. It seemed that as long it didn't happen within the city walls, they didn't care. They

let me in with no troubles. I quickly walked to Meander's shop, where I headed upstairs and to my private room. I quickly began to gather my stuff, and soon Meander appeared in my room.
"What is it?" I asked.
"Directions," Meander said. "Come."
I quickly finished packing my stuff and slung my pack over my shoulder. I then followed Meander downstairs and into his workroom, where he had set up a large map.
"Now, you're going after Julius, right?" he asked.
"Who?" I asked.
"The demon-hybrid, also my brother," Meander grunted.
"Well, yes," I agreed, a little surprised that Meander knew, and that Meander was half-demon.
"All right, you don't have far to walk then. Just northwestward, and you should come upon a stone building. You should also get attacked the minute you approach. I suggest teleporting inside, and into the back room. You'll meet Julius there — And be ready. Julius is no walk around the block," Meander grunted.
"Thank you," I said.
"Stop thanking me, and thank yourself. You're the one with the determination," Meander grunted. 'Now shoo.'

I nodded and quickly left the building. Tessaih was going about its normal business — Buying rare items, spending lots of money, glaring at “tourists” like me, and all-in-all, being snooty. With a sigh, I headed toward the gates, not caring about who I left. Many of them were behind me. I only had a month to go before Eoroqu rose.
I had to move on, quickly.

You could see the stone building from Tessaih — An ominous building that everyone warned of. The COL, they said, owns that building, and any territory within a mile of it. Be careful, everyone, particularly Burmecians. I didn’t understand what was so dangerous about the COL… Even when I found out it stood for Collaboration of Leviathan, I still didn’t understand.
Within a few days I had reached COL territory. It looked quiet, and relatively peaceful, except for the black-dressed men and women patrolling the territory. One of them took one look at me and aimed a crossbow at my throat. I was quick to move out of his gaze, and swiftly into the territory.
It was fight through it. The people in black will always hounding me, whether with questions or weapons. A few times, I even had to kill the person attacking me. They fell quickly, but the more I

killed, the more that seemed to come after me. It was tiring, and I was getting exhausted.

Finally, I couldn't take it anymore. I teleported to the Space World, and decided to spend a long night there. When I woke up, I was quick to explore the world, looking for a star containing the largest room in the mysterious COL Building. I found many stars containing rooms, but most of them held people in black uniforms. To my shock and anger, a few contained Dari and Burmecians. Despite my anger, I reminded myself not to get involved. I had to find Julius, not stop an organization that I had quickly figured out was very powerful.

Finally, after a full two days of searching — two very boring and confusing days — I found the star. Within it was a grand room, and within the room was a single man. Quickly I leapt into the star, and landed in the room.

It was a huge room, probably taking up most of the first story of the building. It was completely made of white stone, except for the floor, which was white marble. Black carpets covered various parts of the floor leading up to a small staircase. This staircase led to a small platform containing a stone table with two chairs. In a few places, the walls, carpets, and floors were stained with red blood. It was a haunting-looking place, and the man within it was

no exception.
He wore almost all black except for his hands and head, which were revealed. He had short hair that looked like it was on fire, though it was only its fiery colors. His hands, which were behind his back, looked normal except for the slits that replaced his nails and clearly held claws. His back was facing me, but I could see that he looked powerful. When I approached him, my claws scraped against the marble, causing him to quickly turn around.
He had emotionless black eyes that looked like endless tunnels of cold emotion. His skin was completely pale, and he appeared to have no facial hair, unless you counted the fiery hair upon his head. He had sharp cheekbones, thin lips, and a smooth chin. I quickly noticed the crossbow he had strapped to his thigh, the arrows in a sack tied to his back, and a scabbard strapped to his other thigh. He regarded me coldly, then snorted.
“So you’re the one Relámpago said would come — how pathetic. A rat,” he spat in a cold, deep voice.
“Don’t judge a book by its cover,” I growled, immediately disliking the man’s attitude.
“Why shouldn’t I?” the man asked, slowly stepping down from the platform. ‘You’re all the same, you rats — Cheating bastards, lying pigs… Doing whatever you can to get power.’

“You lie. I don’t want power,” I snapped.
“Then why are you wandering around Eoroqu, fighting everything? Becoming a legend?” the man spat.
I stared at him, stunned by the retort. I then took a deep breath and managed to reply, “To gain strength to defeat General Beatrix.”
“Strength is power. You’re just like the rest of your God-damn species,” the man spat, slowly taking out his sword.
“Who are you?” I asked, whipping out my spear.
The man chuckled, shaking his head. He spun his sword about and put it in a fighting position. He then looked up at me coldly.
“I’m Julius, leader of the Collaboration of Leviathan, the bastard Meander’s brother,” the man replied. “And you, are a sniveling little rat, with nothing to accomplish, who will officially die today.”
Suddenly Julius rushed forward, throwing me completely off-guard. I managed to dodge the sudden rush, and I tried to stab Julius in the shoulder. My spear tore his clothing, but didn’t break the skin, immediately startling me. Chuckling bitterly, Julius whirled around quickly, and I managed to leap out of the way of the attack. I once again tried to stab Julius, and once again didn’t

break the skin. Julius whirled around and slashed my shoulder open, moving so fast I could barely see him.

I quickly realized why Relámpago wanted me to see Meander, and learn Demon Abilities. It was clear that physical attacks were useless. Dodging another attack from Julius, I rushed backward, holding my spear out in front of me. I muttered demon words under my breath, but at the same time thought ancient words. While my spear “mutated”, dragon spirits appeared and cast Reis’s Wind upon me. I then threw my spear toward Julius, who watched me while cursing.

Julius lifted his sword and slammed it into my spear. My spear slammed into the ground and spun. Julius lifted his booted foot. I made a grab for it, seeing it in a vulnerable position. I managed to grab it just as Julius’s foot came down on it.

Thus, Julius’s foot slammed into my hand. Ignoring the pain, I wretched hand and spear from under his foot and rose to my feet. I received a powerful punch in the head, and it sent me spinning on my feet. Julius then moved forward to slash me in the chest. I managed to block the attack despite my dizziness. To my shock, Julius brought up an amazing struggle. It wasn’t until I called upon demon energy to charge my spear that I began to

win. I managed to shove Julius back, then rushed forward to slash him with my demon-charged spear.
Julius lifted his hand and shot a fireball from it. I ducked, but managed to run forward at the same time. I then stabbed Julius in the shoulder, hoping to weaken him enough so he couldn't use his sword. Julius's response was grabbing my spear and shoving it backward and away from him. The spear moved, though I didn't, and its wooden end slammed straight into my chest. Wincing, I backed away.
Power of the heavens, send the cherry blossoms of hope, I thought quickly.
Pink petals surrounded Julius, and soon exploded when a dragon spirit plowed through them. To my shock, Julius was hurt badly. Cursing vilely, Julius vanished into thin air. I stomped the floor with anger. He could teleport! This was getting aggravating, no matter how great of a challenge it was.
Suddenly a snap filled the air. Before I could react, an arrow had lodged itself into my neck. The arrow was so small, I could understand why I couldn't see it. Quickly I wrenched it from my neck, knowing Reis's Wind would help me out. I tossed the arrow aside, but was quickly knocked to the ground by Julius when he tackled my roughly to the ground. I

quickly noted the small crossbow he held in his hands.

I rolled on the hard ground, and Julius's vicious kick didn't help my case. I managed to roll to my feet, only to be punched in the face. Getting extremely aggravated, I teleported in an attempt to escape. To my shock, Julius also teleported, and soon he was tackling me in the Space World.

Great, he teleports like me! I thought vilely. Why did Meander teach me this if Julius can do it too?

I spun my spear about, allowing it to charge with white energy. Julius rushed for me, but I simply leapt into the nearest star. By luck, I happened to land back in the room I had originally found Julius in. Julius quickly followed, and I took this opportunity to stab him in the stomach. Lancer's extra energy made the wound larger. Snarling, Julius grabbed me by the neck and shoved me into the wall. I punched him in the face, and he quickly let me go.

Julius backed a few feet away from me, and we stared at each other coldly. Then, suddenly, I realized that I wasn't the only one with Regen on. Julius also appeared to have it on, as his wounds were healing on their own! The fight was beginning to get very frustrating, and it was clearly for the both of us.

While I tried to charge my spear, Julius lifted his hand. A fireball shot from it, and I just managed to dodge. Meanwhile, I leapt into the air, hoping to not hit the ceiling. In the end, it wouldn't have mattered if I did, because Julius shot a fireball at me. It nailed me and sent me straight into the wall. I fell onto my knees, gasping.

"You're pathetic. Weak and pathetic," Julius spat.

"It's not over," I replied, whipping a hidden Hi-Potion out of my pocket and drinking the bottle's contents before Julius can respond. 'I'm very prepared.'

"Are you prepared for this?" Julius asked, snapping his fingers.

A few seconds passed, and as I rose to my feet, I wondered what Julius had in mind. The answer soon came when the door to the room suddenly burst open, revealing four more antagonists for me to deal with. I groaned, wondering how I would survive this one. This was not what I had in mind!

Suddenly all five people in the room charged for me. I lifted my charged spear and waited patiently for them to be on me. I then used my spear like a blade, slashing across them all. Unfortunately, I only slashed the throats of two of the people. Julius and the two still— standing henchman backed away, then rushed for me again. In a blur of words and

thoughts, I said and thought words that didn’t even make sense to me.
Suddenly a dragon head appeared from behind Julius and the two henchmen. It sent fiery breath onto them while at the same time, a dragon spirit made pink petals explode. The two henchmen fell while Julius vanished into thin air. He appeared a few feet away, drinking a Potion. The two of us then stared at each other coldly.
We both then fired a spell, mine a large star-shaped ball of energy, his a huge fireball. We were both hit, and slammed into opposite walls. We lied in place, panting and staring at each other coldly.
In a flash we met in the center of the room, my spear and his sword locked in a struggle. We stood there in a stalemate, trying to stare each other down.
“You can’t make it,” Julius spat at me, causing me to snort. ‘Like all of your race you have too much arrogance, too much confidence. You’re going to be killed by that General… You’d be best to head on home.’
“You seem to underestimate me,” I spat, thinking demon words at the same time. Suddenly my spear charged with energy, and I used it to shove Julius back. I then kicked Julius hard in the stomach, causing him to fall over, though it didn’t damage him. Swiftly, before he could react, I kicked his

sword out of his hand, and I aimed my spear at his throat. Julius stared at me coldly.
“The road remains wide open while your dreams are alive. Only fear can block the way,” I spat.
“And do you have fear?” Julius asked.
“Does it look like I do? And if I did, fear is used to bring forward, to give the strength to beat it back. My road is open. My dreams are awake. And there is no fear to stop me from accomplishing my goal! You can not stop it. Fear can not stop it. I will accomplish my goal,” I growled, putting away from spear.
“Such arrogance is going to get you killed,” Julius growled, rising to his feet. ‘You will get to your goal, but not be the same. Your arrogance will block your eyes from seeing the truth — That you are not strong enough, and that you should go home. Make a good choice, boy! Beatrix is not a simple girl who will allow you to go forward and fight her! If you want to go forward and be forever changed, so be it. But if you are smart, you’ll remember my words.’
I snorted, watching Julius coldly. “Your words are made to create fear. Haven’t I already told you that fear should propel you forward, not away?”
“In this case, fear should be listened to. Now scram,” Julius spat.
“Gladly,” I growled.

With that, I teleported, leaving the building, and beginning a quiet walk through the Space World. Julius had angered me, but his words were all too ominous and predicting. It seemed as if he knew what he was saying.
Should I go home? I asked.
My mind replied with no. I nodded to myself. I couldn't let Julius think that I was a weakling, a weakling who had decided to follow his words and head on home. I couldn't let him get what he wanted. He would not ruin my dreams. He would not make me back down. I would keep on.
Soon I found the star I wanted — The star leading back to the Dari, where I would make my last stop before Eoroqu rose. Before I entered it, however, I looked around the Space World, wondering if perhaps I was being a little arrogant. I then shook my head. I just had confidence… It did not seem overpowering to me. Julius had to be wrong… Wrong about what he said about me, and the Burmecians.
With a quiet nod to myself, I leapt through the star.

——— So Fratley finishes much more quickly than Meander expected and creams him. Then he "defeats" Julius, though the battle was never really finished. And now Julius is predicting Fratley's

end… Dun dun dun! Oh, and did you find Fratley's other quote? ;)

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Chapter Twenty

Chapter Twenty
Dragon's Call

The Dari seemed surprised and rather happy at my sudden return. Many of them, however, seemed to understand that I would be heading off quickly. Most of my time with the Dari was spent learning about the many ships heading to the Mist Continent. You did not need a special ticket to get on; you only needed the Gil to pay to get on. Most of the ships sounded impressively expensive, but one had a price I knew I could afford. This ship, called the Dragon’s Call, was a massive, high-tech ship that had the ability to fly in the air. I soon realized that it was an airship; I had heard about them, but never seen them.

The Dragon’s Call was going to Lindblum, and it was leaving a day before Eoroqu fell back into darkness. According to Lizzy, the price of admission was 2500 Gil, which was cheap in comparison to the sea-faring, old freighters that still managed to sail despite their age.

While with the Dari, I was able to catch up on old times. Lizzy’s five kids, who had names, finally,

were already a year old and growing quickly. They found me interesting, each of them staring up at me with a different set of unique eyes. In a year, it seemed like everything had changed — And it had.

“So this is… Posy?” I asked, looking down at one of Lizzie and Ronde’s girls, a white-furred Dari with green eyes. She reminded me much of Freya, though Freya was much older.

“Yep. We were out o’ names,” Lizzy replied, watching me. Tarot, one of the males with bluish fur and near-black eyes, was in her arms. Clearly, he had simply wanted to be held.

I nodded. “Makes enough sense. So when is the Dragon’s Call—?”

“Tomorrow,” Lizzy reminded me, putting Tarot down on the floor. Tarot glared at her and let out a soft whimper. Lizzy ignored him. ‘I’d like ta tell ya somethin’.’

“What is it?” I asked, looking over at Lizzy while I allowed Posy to chew my finger. It didn’t hurt in the least.

“Ya know Jason?” Lizzy asked, looking over at Tarot to make sure he didn’t go crawling away.

“How could I not?” I asked, soon finding I had two children who wanted to chew my fingers.

“We caught ’im on a murder attempt. Tried ta kill Ronde,” Lizzy said quietly, lifting Yvonne, a roan-

eyed female with gray fur, into her arms.
I looked over at Lizzy with shock, startled by the news. Meanwhile, I lifted Posy into my own arms, finding that her chewing on my finger was starting to get a little annoying. “Really?”
“Seriously. Tarot! Get back ‘ere!” Lizzy suddenly snapped at Tarot, who had been trying to crawl outside. He looked over at Lizzy and made a hissing noise. ‘Crazy child. Anyway, it turns out Jason ’ad murdered before. Before ya came ’ere, ’e ’ad murdered my sister, who ’ad been leadin’ the huntin’ team. ’E’s gone now… Sent ’im ta go get eaten by the wild.’
“I see,” I said, watching as Uio, a brown-furred, blue-eyed male, lied in the corner. “He going to come out?”
“Uio? No, e’s a shy one,” Lizzy said with a frown. ‘Neve’ wants ta play… I don’ know why. TAROT!’
I laughed. “His opinion is leaving.”
“’Opefully Ronde will catch ’im,” Lizzy said, watching Tarot continue on his way toward the opening. “Yep. I ’ere ’im.”
I nodded as I put Posy down on the floor, causing her to look up at me with innocent eyes. I looked outside, to where I could see the sun slowly setting. I then watched as Ronde came in and picked up a now clearly frustrated Tarot. I looked at the two and

nodded.
“I’ll be leaving now. Good luck,” I said with a light smile.
“Take care o’ yeself,” Lizzy said while Ronde nodded.
I quickly left the tent and headed toward my own. I had to prepare to move out by nightfall.

Packing up and leaving was easier than it had been the first time. I found that I could leave with more ease. The Dari still had their traditional smiles and “Good lucks”, but they too seemed to find it easier since I had not stayed long, and had been with them before. Soon, I was out in the wilderness, heading toward the Doorian coast, where the Dragon’s Call was supposed to land.
The night was strangely quiet; that was the first thing I noticed as I traveled the now cold, dark desert. Normally night critters were actively pursuing prey, and watching me with eerie, glowing green eyes. Far more monstrous creatures would watch me as if ready to eat me, hence my spear being out and ready. Yet for once, none of these creatures were around. Nothing stirred; it was unsettling.
Finally, after an hour of unsettling traveling, I came to a stop. A feeling of great suspicion and

unsettlement had come over me. I readied my spear as I looked around, able to see rather clearly in the dark.

That was when I heard it; a distinct scraping of claws against the sand. I spun my spear about as I readied it. The footsteps came ever closer. I thought I heard someone breathing, but I definitely heard the sound of metal scraping against metal. I took a deep breath as I waited quietly.

Then, just as I felt a rush of air behind me, I spun about and thrust my spear straight into Jason's chest. I was not surprised that it was he, though I felt slightly guilty for having to kill him. I retracted my spear and quickly shoved him to the ground. Jason fell to the ground, dropping the spear he had been holding.

"There is no excuse for murder," I growled.

"You?" Jason muttered.

"And you," I replied with a sigh. "While I had guessed you may have been a criminal I never guessed you'd be a murderer. I guess you had this in for you… Best wishes in the underworld."

Jason stared at me coldly. I walked over to the spear he had and picked it up. It really wasn't a spear… It was more like an axe. The blade of the spear was situated on the side, though a jagged edge rose to allow piercing to be done. The larger part of the

blade was shaped like a massive, reddish-white axe blade. The lance could slash, or it could pierce. Furthermore, the wood was strong, and could easily stand pressure. I nodded to myself and looked down at Jason, who was about to fall unconscious.
“I’ll take this,” I muttered, dropping the spear I had originally taken, and spinning my new one to test its strength. “You won’t need it, after all.”
With those words, I turned around and headed back in the direction of the Doorian Coast. Guilt was within my mind for my actions, but I knew they were for the better. The Dari were safer now, and now I was more prepared for Beatrix.

I was approaching the sandy Doorian Coast, having long left the Lore Desert, when I was startled by a magnificent wonder. Coming from the east, clearly having come from Aspen, was a massive airship. It had the distinct shape of a dragon, with the bow shaped like a red dragon whose maw was parted in a call. Spread below it were wings, designed just like a dragon’s. The stern was just like a dragon’s tail, and the entire ship had been made with red-painted steel, and had been applied to look like dragon scales. I could see, even from that distance, that there was a massive deck, and that the buildings were topped with spine-like structures that

probably helped with flight. The ship had a Mist Engine that I could easily see, and I could see why the ship was flying so early; it needed the morning fog to fly.

Suddenly, a huge roar emitted from the ship, and I could see it heading straight for the coast. It continued on a steady descent, with no landing gear in sight. I watched with confusion, wondering how the ship could land when it had no gear to land on, and no dock to come at.

The ship made do by landing straight into the water of the Doorian River. With a massive splash, the airship landed in the water, and was soon afloat, floating in the massive river that managed to hold it. Another roar came from the ship, and I saw two people push a ladder over the side of the ship. As I approached, I heard someone shout, “Doorian Coast!”

Slowly, in a single-file line, a massive group of people began to leave the airship. Many of them stared at me curiously as they got down, but just as quickly they headed in many different directions. None of them headed toward the Lore Desert; most of them headed in the direction of Tessaih. The others headed northward, toward a massive cavern.

Finally, by the time the unloading had stopped, the sun had already risen, and it was early morning. I sat

down to watch as the ship's crew began to clean off the ship and repair any damage. It lasted for hours, in which most people would've realized they had done nothing special, but I simply sat there mesmerized.

As I sat there, more people began to show up, eager to ride the airship. Most of them appeared to be warriors, equip with many weapons and layers of armors. I shook my head at them; they would be too slow to fight much of anything, in my eyes. A few warriors, however, had bows and arrows, and they seemed better equip for fighting.

Then there were the few people who simply appeared to be nobles wanting to travel, doctors with patients to treat, and average citizens with money to spare. Most of them didn't watch the airship like it was some wonder. Out of everyone, I was the only one who found the airship fascinating.

We were all startled, however, when the airship suddenly let out a roar. A person appeared on the deck.

"Dragon's Call, leaving in three hours!" the man shouted.

Immediately everyone moved, but I was quicker. Within a few seconds I had sprinted over to the ladder. A person leapt down from the ship and smiled at me.

“Hello. Here to board?” he asked, long strands of brown hair falling over his blue eyes.
I nodded, watching as the man tried to reorganize his hair. He only seemed to be making it worse.
“Gil, then,” the man said, holding his hand, which was smudged with dirt and charcoal, out temporarily. I quickly dropped 2500 Gil into his hand. The man briefly stopped trying to reorganize hair so he could count the money. He then nodded, “Have fun.”
I didn’t bother climbing the ladder. I simply leapt straight up and onto the deck of the airship. Despite the easy jump, however, I was startled by how high up I was. The airship had to at least be three stories high, probably more. I looked over the edge to see that the people looked strangely small; not like ants, but smaller than they really were. They were also swiftly moving to the long ladder. I looked upward, and saw the Lore Desert stretching for miles. As I continued to look around, I could see the massive Illiad Forest, a little bit of the Orca River, and the Thunder Mountains in the far distance. Uma’s Lake was clearly seen, and, as I continued to look around, the massive Liosa Mountains loomed in the distance. Tessaih, and the COL Headquarters were like small dots. It was an amazing sight.
I finally tore my gaze away from the scenery and

toward the airship cabin. It covered in metal plates set up to look like red dragon scales. Spin-like, tall metal structures stuck out from the top. A few people had opened the black steel door and had gone inside. I walked across the black, steel-plated deck and into the room. A single massive table was set up near the door, and already two crewmembers were starting up a card game with two passengers. Controls for the airship were set up near the bow. A bearded man who appeared to be 500-years-old was fiddling with the controls. He looked over at everyone in the cabin briefly before smiled beneath his brown, graying beard and going back to his work.

I left the cabin, finding it to hold nothing of my liking. On the deck, many more passengers were getting on. Most of them were leaning against the black, steel railings, chatting peacefully with each other. None of them seemed exactly impressed to be on an airship. I figured they must’ve already been on them many times before.

“So, you new here?” a gruff voice asked behind me.

I whirled around to find a large man staring down at me. He was around six feet tall, and looked fairly dangerous. He wore black, heavy— looking armor, while a massive sword was strapped to his thigh. His brownish skin appeared to be tanned. He looked

down at me curiously with brown eyes while I nodded.
“That’s what I figured. You look awfully excited to be on such a silly airship,” the man said, looking around.
“Silly? I think it’s brilliant,” I quickly replied.
“Lindblum has better. When we get there, you will see,” the man said. He held out a large, gloved hand. ‘I’m Rege. Who are you?’
“Fratley,” I replied, taking the man’s hand and shaking it.
Rege’s eyebrows lifted. “Iron-tail?”
“Yes,” I answered, surprised at how quickly news traveled.
“You’re only a kid,” Rege commented under his breath.
“Sixteen.”
“Ah. As I thought. So, what brings you on this airship?”
“I’m heading back to my home continent.”
“But not Burmecia?”
“I have no need to return as of yet.”
“Ah.”
Suddenly a massive roar issued from the Dragon’s Call’s bow. A small smile came over Rege’s face as he looked around.
“Finally, we’re heading off,” Rege said.

“The airship is going to leave?” I asked, looking around curiously.
“Yep. The ship’s probably going to lurch quite a bit — It may take some time to get into the air, but we’ll make it,” Rege said, looking around. ‘Not a lot of mist in the water, after all. Luckily the Dragon’s Call was a boat before an airship.’
“It was?” I asked with interest.
“Yep. It was built during the last Demi War, to fight against the Dari. It was built to be resistant against fire, claws — Anything brought against it. That’s why so many people rode it after the war — They knew it was safe,” Rege explained.
“Was weaponry removed?” I asked.
“Nope. The weaponry is hidden. It was kept in as a precaution, but now is kept maintained since the damn COL came into power. Boats, airships… Any method of transportation has to be careful. The COL are—”
Suddenly the airship lurched forward, causing me to nearly lose my footing. I grasped the railing to keep on my feet. The ship was beginning to vibrate; the engine had begun to operate. No one but me seemed surprised. Regre chuckled, watching me with amusement.
“Ah, we’re heading off,” he commented softly.
I looked up ahead of me, wondering what was to

come next. The engine seemed to be operating roughly, and it was making the whole airship shake. Below my feet, something seemed to be moving. The airship lurched forward again, then again. The third time, however, it kept moving forward at a slow, shaky speed. I felt like I was going to vomit. I closed my eyes, hoping to drive away the nausea.

I felt the ship moving to the right. The ship was shaking less often, and now the shaking was like a soft rumble. I opened my eyes, only to find the airship to have left the river. It was following Eoroqu's coast. The engine was gaining more and more strength, and the airship was moving more quickly. I looked around, and noted that everyone outside was holding a railing.

"We'll probably be in the air soon," Rege muttered.

"Yep."

As Rege said the final word, the airship suddenly lurched upward. I gripped the railing of the airship tightly, staring at the ocean below. The airship had gained a lot of speed. It continued to lurch upward, and suddenly the engine let out a massive roar. I saw steam explode outward from the ship's stern. The steam rose above and into the air. The airship was shaking as it started to head steadily upward. I closed my eyes, feeling the nausea come again. The ship was at a high angle. For hours, it seemed to be

like that. Then, suddenly, the ship began to straighten. I could feel moisture in the air. I opened my eyes, and was shocked to find the airship covered by thick mist. I couldn't see the ocean below. Rege was watching me with a grin.
"Impressive, eh? It's best for the airships to travel up here near Eoroqu. COL can't see you well, and besides, the Mist helps the engine. We should lower once we approach Lindblum," Rege explained.
"The airship's bound for Lindblum?" I asked, staring at the Mist.
"Yep," Rege said proudly. He then frowned suddenly, and I did too, for the ship was suddenly turning. "Now what?"
I looked around, and noted that the ship was turning back toward the continent. Rege's frown deepened as he seemed to listen to the engine. I also listened, and noted the strange noises it made.
"Not enough Mist," Rege muttered. 'This is bad. We're turning right toward the COL. They may not attack, unless they suspect us of carrying you or other Burmecians.'
"Can we deal with them?" I asked.
"Oh, yeah, the Dragon's Call can cream them. But it'll waste a lot of—" Rege was cut off by a massive roar.
The roar hadn't come from the Dragon's Call, which

was coming to a stop. It had come from something that was living. In the airship's hull, I felt movement. I clutched the railing as the ship shook. Many people on the deck looked around nervously. The door to the cabin opened, and the captain appeared in the doorway.

"In here, everyone, unless you want to be fried," the captain said calmly, his green eyes examining everyone.

Everyone but Rege and I disappeared into the cabin. The captain closed the door without asking for us to come in. I heard the cabin door lock, and another roar came from above.

"Why didn't you—" I began.

"I want to watch the show, just like you," Rege said calmly. "Ah, there it is."

Cutting through the Mist was a massive dragon. It was at least thirteen feet long from head to tail, with a three-foot-long tail and a three-foot-long neck. Its small head was decorated with massive horns, and it had red eyes with a flame within these eyes. It snorted black pillows of smoke from small nostrils. Its legs appeared to be four-feet-long, and its large paws were bird-like, with a backward claw and three front claws. The claws were each three-feet-long. The dragon's wingspan was at least sixteen-feet-long. The entire dragon was covered in red flames.

“A Flaming Dragon,” Rege muttered. ‘This’ll be fun! I wonder, is it the COL at all?’
“Do they normally use dragons?” I asked, watching the Flaming Dragon roar.
“Not Flamers. Normally they have Silver or Grand,” Rege muttered. “I think we’re just in its — WHOA!”
The Flaming Dragon suddenly spat red flames from its short snout. The Dragon’s Call suddenly swerved, sending Rege and I both sprawled on the deck. We both rose to a sitting position, but decided to stay where we were. Meanwhile, the movement in the hull had stopped.
The Dragon’s Call swerved again, and soon the bow faced the angry Flaming Dragon. The Flaming Dragon snarled angrily, mouth agape and revealing flaming fangs that were at least four-feet-long. In the hull, I thought I heard a strange noise, like something powering up. Then the whole airship shook as two massive cannons fired.
Two Bombs flew from the cannons. The Bombs soon steadied their near— round, flaming bodies and stared wickedly at the Dragon. They then flew over to it, flames flickering on the top if their heads. The Dragon snarled angrily and tried to scratch one of the Bombs, only to make it begin inflating swiftly. In fact, both Bombs were inflating quickly.

Meanwhile, the Dragon's Call was heading away from the dragon. The Dragon, noticing the retreat, snarled angrily and tried to go after the airship. Unfortunately for it, the Bombs had already reached maximum size.

The two Bombs exploded, taking the Dragon with them. The Dragon snarled with pain, while the explosion just missed the Dragon's Call. The Flaming Dragon plummeted from the sky. Below, I heard it hit the ground with a massive thud.

Rege looked extremely concerned even though the danger was over. He was looking around nervously. Clearly, the captain knew of danger too, for the Dragon's Call had not yet retreated. I looked around, wondering what was wrong.

Five minutes passed, and nothing came. Slowly the Dragon's Call began to turn about. It then began to steadily head toward the ocean once more. The morning fog was beginning to clear up. Slowly the Dragon's Call began to descend, though I did not understand why. Wasn't the fog above us all? If so, shouldn't the airship be following it?

Fifteen minutes later, the ocean came into sight. I could see nothing on the ocean. Clearly, the captain hadn't seen anything either, for the airship began to ascend again. The hull shook as the weapons began to return to the hull. The cabin door was unlocked,

and a few people came onto the deck.
“That was interesting,” Rege muttered, rising to his feet. ‘So we had to fight a dragon just to collect a little fog to move forward. Fascinating.’
“Is that an everyday happening?” I asked curiously.
“Ah, no. But Dragons are territorial, so I’m not surprised,” Rege said. He walked over to the railing and looked around. The fog was above us, so you could see around you.
I rose to my feet and looked around quietly. In the distance, I could see a massive mountain range that separated Burmecia and Cleyra from the rest of the Mist Continent. Unfortunately, I couldn’t recall the mountain range’s name. I turned my gaze toward our destination. In the far distance, I could see a massive castle towering over much of the Continent. I couldn’t remember what it was either. It was clear, however, that it was our destination, so it had to be Lindblum.
Rege noted my gaze on Lindblum, and he smiled slightly.
“Amazing city, Lindblum,” he muttered. ‘Very technologically advanced, not to mention well run. It’s a good place to go to.’
“How far away is Alexandria?” I asked curiously.
“Pretty far away,” Rege replied. “Long walk, and not many airships travel between the two countries

these days. Why? That your destination?”
I nodded, but said nothing more. I simply watched as Lindblum became steadily closer as the Dragon’s Call flew toward it.

———— Well, there’s that! So Fratley’s (finally) heading back to the Mist Continent! What awaits him there? Gee, I wonder…

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Chapter Twentyone

Chapter Twenty-one
Of Lindblum & Alexandria

The Dragon's Call proved itself to be a swift-running, well— maintained airship, or at least it was in my eyes. The trip from the Eoroqu to Lindblum lasted a total of three hours; I could've swam to the shores near Cleyra in less than that, but then it would've taken longer to get to Alexandria. Home also would've called me, and if I met any old friends, I knew I'd be willing to stay and leave everything unaccomplished. Therefore, despite the long ride, I welcome the Dragon's Call and its transportation.

Most of the trip I spent playing card games. Staring at the Mist Continent quickly lost its lust, particularly since the rising fog we traveled in blocked out most of what could be seen. Five passengers, myself included, played a friendly game of Black Jack, and I quickly found that I needed to improve my game, particularly since I lost 250 of my Gil to a young crewmember just reaching his fifteenth year.

"I've played Black Jack for years now," the

crewmember said, pushing a long strand of red hair over his ears. ‘Me father taught me. He was a killer too, but I beat ’em hands down.’

“Aw, Gerek, I hate playin’ againsht ye,” one crewmember complained, smoking casually from a pipe. “Ye always beat meh and I cawn’t catch up for e million Gil.”

The young Gerek laughed. “Ah, Mich, you’re not too bad yeself! Maybe if you’d smoke a lil’ less and concentrate a lil’ more you wouldn’t do so bad!”

Mich’s mocha-brown eyes narrowed as he stared at Gerek with clear annoyance. Laughter bubbled around the large table while Gerek grinned, showing off a mouth that would be full of near-white teeth if it weren’t for two canines missing, one on the top, one on the bottom. Then, his green eyes sparkling, Gerek closed his mouth and gathered up the cards. He began to shuffle them, watching the group surrounding him.

“Well, who’s up for another one?” he asked.

“Aw, what thee hell. Gerek, I’ll play another one, but theesh time I’ma hopin’ I’ll ween!” Mich declared, eyes flashing wickedly.

“I wouldn’t mind another game as well,” I declared.

“Aw, jeez! Not another one who knows theesh game like the back of hees hand!” Mich moaned good-naturedly while three more people declared that

they’d gladly play.
Gerek chuckled. “All righty, then. Mark, you deal.”
Gerek tossed the shuffled deck across the table. A gnarly hand lightly covered with thick, brown fur caught it. Mark smiled, though, having somewhat of a snout, if a short one, his smile looked ominous and wicked. His brown eyes sparkled while his triangular, upright dog-ears perked. His face was thickly covered with brown fur, and everyone sitting near him could see his furry, dog-like tail wagging happily.
“My pleasure,” Mark said, his voice holding a heavy accent that could easily be compared to a dog’s growl. ‘Let us start this game.’
“You’ll make us a great dealer. That nose eh yers can sniff out thee cheaters!” Mich joked.
Indeed, Mark’s nose was black, and much like a dog’s. It was also powerful, from what I had seen. Mark ignored Mich, and instead, the game began. It swiftly came by, with Gerek once again the winner. Mich, as usual, was grumbling with anger, particularly since Gerek won with a black jack. I had gotten close to winning, but in the end, I was bust with a very painful 28. I had a funny feeling I shouldn’t have drawn another card when I had a score of 18.
“And that’s that,” Gerek said triumphantly. He

looked around, grinning. ‘Anyone else up for a game?’
“I dun think so, Gerek. I’ve ‘ad enough of theesh ’lose from thee start’ beesuness,” Mich grumbled. “Let’sa talk instead.”
“Talking works very well, m’ friend,” Gerek replied. He looked over at me. ‘It’s been a while since I’ve seen a Burmecian. What were ye on Eoroqu for?’
“I was preparing for a battle,” I replied. “I needed to gain strength. Eoroqu’s known for its strength.”
Mich laughed. “Yeah, that’s what we want peeps te think.”
“Mist Continent didn’t hold anythin’ good?” Gerek asked. “I heard it’s got some good warriors… Beatrix, Aireff…”
“Beatrix is my opponent,” I replied calmly. ‘Aireff’s my father.’
“Oh!” Gerek said with a laugh. “Now I get it. You already knew the best of the best.”
“Exactly, but I needed to know beyond the best. I think I do now,” I replied.
“Why didn’ch ye jus’ teleport back to the Mist?” Mich asked. ‘I saw Meander teach ye to teleport.’
“I didn’t think of it,” I replied. “Besides, I don’t know everything about Alexandria, so it’d take a while to find her in the Space. I’d get ill before I’d find her.”

“I see ye point. Besides, traveling’s worthwhile,” Gerek declared.

At this point the airship shook, nearly sending Gerek off his chair. Laughter erupted from most of the table, while Gerek shook his head, chuckling.

“Well, it’s normally enjoyable,” He replied.

“That normal?” I asked, lifting my gaze to the window. As usual, Mist clogged the sky, but it looked like the Mist was moving upward.

Gerek looked up, his eyes soon focusing on the window. He seemed to nod to himself, and I wondered curiously what was on his mind. The airship shook again, this time with more violence, and quite a few people had to take hold of the table. I quickly realized that the ship was moving downward, slowly but surely.

“Are you we at Lindblum?” I guessed aloud.

“Smart one,” Gerek muttered.

The airship continued to descend, though the vibrations and jolts had long since passed. Outside, a roar came, but it was not a roar from a monster. It sounded mechanical, as if coming from something unliving. The mist, I noted, was breaking up a bit, though I still couldn’t see into the distance. What I could see, however, were airships, very close to the Dragon’s Call, heading in all directions.

Then, suddenly, the mist was gone. It seemed as if

the ship had suddenly teleported into a different world… The sun beamed down unthreatened. Buildings, hundreds of buildings, stretched in all direction. Airships flew through the skies, and there were so many designs, I couldn't examine just one airship. I looked back to the people within the Dragon's Call, but none seemed impressed by the place. In fact, they all looked bored, and surprised at my own surprise. They had all been to Lindblum before, it seemed.

Suddenly, the airship shook roughly, and I heard the engines rumbling while they shut down. With a final, light shake, the airship was still. I turned to the window, and find a dark wall, with light evident on the other side of the airship.

"Ride's over. Here be Lindblum," the captain grunted.

We all rose and left the cabin. Four people, dressed in white, blue, and gold uniforms complete with a pointy, white hat, were examining the airship. The captain of the Dragon's Call slipped past the crowd and handed a piece of paper to one of the men. The man quickly read it, nodded, and shouted a few orders. The men stepped aside, and people began to step carefully down from the deck of the Dragon's Call and onto the ground. It was an easy step for most, since the airship was low enough for ladders

or stairs required, but some people were nervous.
I quickly got by a few nervous and slow people and easily stepped onto the metal ground. The first thing I quickly noted was the fact that the room was huge. Behind me were what I assumed to be airship docks; they appeared able to take many airships at once. The Dragon's Call was at the dock, but so were two other airships that made the Dragon's Call look small. Both airships were decorated with silver and gold, and appeared to be fancy, traveling airships for the rich. Uninterested in them, I took a few careful steps forward, trying to figure out where to go. I soon saw the door leading out… And then another. Pausing, I tried to consider which way to go. Noting that one door led to the castle, where I didn't want to go, I took the other door, and soon found myself outside.
Various people walked around, yet I could still see a blue, odd machine rising into the air. Mist was rising from the platform underneath the machine, and the machine itself was running on propellers. The propellers bent backward, and suddenly, the machine sped away. I watched the mysterious machine with awe as it sped away.
"Never saw an aircab, friend?"
The voice was not familiar to my ears, yet I quickly located the speaker. To my surprise, it was a

Burmecian. His white fur was a pleasant sight, reminding me that I was close to home, and not back with the Dari. He had black hair that just reached his shoulders, and deep mocha eyes. I quickly noted the outfit he wore. First, I could see that he wore black pants made of the skin of an unknown monster. Decorated the bottom of these pants were griffon feathers. Over a white shirt he wore a vest made out of the scales of a Green Dragon. Covering the vest and shirt was jacket, made out of the same material as his pants. On this jacket, I could see a metal emblem with four distinct squares. Two squares, the white and yellow, with the white in the upper left corner and the yellow in the bottom right, signaled a Dragon Warrior. The other two, a dark blue in the bottom left and a deep violet in the upper right, were ones I did not recognize. Atop his head he wore a black hat with two holes in it, clearly eyeholes. Decorating both sides of the hat were griffon feathers. The hat was clearly a piece of armor, just like the rest of his clothing. The Burmecian leaned casually against his spear, a four-tipped, trident-like metallic weapon with a deep sea-green color. Aquamarines decorated the spikes. He smiled lightly at me, extending a long-nailed, white hand.

“Sir Malthus of Burmecia at your service,” he said calmly in his rich baritone voice.

“The pleasure is mind, Sir Malthus. I am Sir Fratley of Burmecia,” I replied, taking the other’s hand and shaking it. ‘You are a Dragon Warrior?’
“Have been for ten years now,” Malthus told me. He smiled broadly. “Sir Fratley? Iron-tail, I take it?”
“How did you know?” I asked curiously.
“Rumors, myths, and legends coming from Eoroqu tell much of you. You beat Relámpago, did you not?” Malthus asked.
“Yes, I did,” I replied.
“You’re a young one,” Malthus said, smiling.
“I can’t be much younger than you,” I replied.
“I’m 27. Surely you couldn’t have even reached your nineteenth year,” Malthus replied.
I blinked with surprise; Malthus looked far younger than he stated. Apparently, he had not had a very hard time as a Dragon Warrior. Either that or he was able to take it well. Malthus, clearly seeing my surprised look, chuckled softly.
“It’s not what you think. I’ve fought a few fine battles, but with nothing more than monsters and thugs. I have yet to go into a real battle,” Malthus explained. He looked out into the distance, staring at the horizon. ‘I pray it will not come soon.’
“Why do you say that?” I asked curiously.
“Do you not know? Queen Brahne of Alexandria has been acting very strangely lately. Ever since the

death of the King… And she's been odder since Garnet's birthday passed. There are rumors that she plans to attack Burmecia," Malthus explained.

I stared at Malthus with horror for a few seconds, then regained my posture. Apparently I would have to get to Alexandria quickly. Within my mind, I felt that Beatrix was still the main problem; defeating her, I felt, would lessen the problems, if not eliminate them. Yet I was still shocked at how quickly everything had happened. I had only been away from the Mist Continent for a year, and Brahne was already being rumored to start an attack.

"I must get to Alexandria, then," I said resolutely.

"Alexandria? You're a Dragon Warrior. You should come back with me, to Burmecia," Malthus replied, staring at me with concern clouding his eyes.

"I plan to go to Alexandria to fight Beatrix. She is the General, and I am sure she may be corrupting the Queen, or at least helping her with these decisions. She—" I was cut off by the roar of a machine.

I turned about, and saw that the mysterious blue machine, an aircab as Malthus called it, had returned. It quickly landed in a lowered platform. A door within its side opened, and a small group of people poured out. As soon as everyone was out, a conductor appeared in the doorway.

"Business District! Leaving for Business in five

minutes!” the conductor declared, then disappeared back into the aircab.

I was shocked by the mob of people who flocked to the aircab, and even more surprised at Malthus was one of them. Deciding he was the only one who would be willing to help me around town (or at least out of town), I swiftly followed him. Seeing a Burmecian approach with a spear made many people move aside to let Malthus pass, and I took this opportunity to slip in behind him.

Inside the aircab, there seemed to be nothing but people. There was no place to stand without brushing against someone’s shoulder. Malthus, noting this, simply stood right outside the doorway, and I soon stood with him. He leaned casually against the aircab, and pulled down his hat. Then, pulling his spear close to him, he became perfectly still, and almost seemed to blend into the aircab interior.

Suddenly the door near me closed, startling me. The aircab shook, and I could hear the propellers spinning. I heard mist exhale from the aircab, and suddenly I felt the aircab lift into the air. The experience seemed futile compared to an airship, however, and I was relatively calm. Malthus was much calmer, however; the Dragon Warrior looked asleep.

The aircab soon was clearly moving forward; I could see the Lindblum landscape whipping by. The aircab was full of chatter, but Malthus was completely silent. If it weren't for the fact that Burmecians can't sleep very well when leaning against a wall, I would've thought he'd fallen asleep in a few seconds.

Suddenly the aircab began to fly lower, clearly to land. I was surprised by how quickly we had traveled; perhaps the Dragon's Call was an old ship after all. Either that or Lindblum's aircabs were incredibly fast.

The aircab shuddered violently as it landed, and that seemed to jolt Malthus to reality. Pulling his hat back above his eyes, he rose to his full five-foot, four-inch height. The aircab let out one final shudder before someone outside opened the door. Quickly I slipped outside, only to find myself faced with no direct place to go. I heard a chuckle behind me, and soon saw Malthus appear beside me. He looked over at me, and I thought I saw amusement within his mocha eyes.

"You'll get lost if you don't know your way around," Malthus told me. "Come. I'll show you the way out of here. It is not too far."

Malthus quickly stepped forward, though it may have been the massive crowd spilling out behind us

that made him rush forward. We quickly hurried to a door that led to light and therefore outside. The minute we were outside, I was shocked. There were hundreds of buildings spreading in all directions. Even Burmecia wasn't nearly this huge. I found myself only able to gawk at the many buildings, the airships flying through the sky, and the hundreds of people walking the streets.

A light tap on the shoulder brought me back to reality, and the fact that Malthus was heading toward a set of stairs. I quickly followed, managing to get past the massive crowds. We followed a small group down the stairs, and I soon found myself in a massive corridor, brownish in general color. Two guards saluted the group leaving, and didn't question where we were. Malthus walked over to a massive set of doors, and with incredible ease pushed one open. Outside, I could see endless green grass, mountains in the distance, and a mist.

Quickly I rushed over to the door. Malthus smiled lightly, looking out toward the grasses. He didn't leave, however. Instead, he turned his gaze on me.

"This is the way out," he said, as if it wasn't clear. 'If you want, we can return and get supplies.'

"No. No, I am sorry, but I must hurry," I explained quickly.

Malthus nodded and moved aside, leaving the way

open for me. He tipped his hat, then turned around and quietly left, without even a word of goodbye. I simply nodded at his leaving form and, taking a deep breath, stepped out into the world.

The trip to Alexandria was mysteriously easy. The monsters that attacked me were swiftly disposed of, so swiftly it seemed almost dull. Most people would've take a week to reach Alexandria, while I only took four days to travel to the city. I was quickly relieved when, after getting onto the massive Alexandria Plateau via a quick mountain detour, to see the many man-made canals leading into a waterfall down into the Evil Forest. I walked over to the city, and was not stopped by anyone as I entered. It was mid-afternoon and, spinning my spear a bit, I entered with full confidence.

The first place I headed toward was the Castle, and it took me little trouble to get to the boat leading there.

"Excuse me. I'd like to go to the Castle," I told one of the guards.

"Do you have permission?" one of the guards asked, staring at me suspiciously.

"Well, no, but—" I began.

"I'm afraid we can't let you in, then. The Queen wants no unexpected visitors," the other guard said.

I didn’t bother trying to convince them to let me through. I simply began to head down the canal, following it carefully, trying to find a way to swim or leap across without being seen. I didn’t note that I left the main part of the city that people walked, and that I was practically alone. I was only considered with crossing the moat.

“Can I help you with something?”

I practically tripped over my own feet at the sound of the familiar voice. Somehow I managed to keep my footing. I immediately whirled about, and saw none other than my very opponent standing before me, watching me calmly with her brown eye, the other eye hidden by a cloth wrapped around it.

Beatrix seemed to stare right through me, and her eye narrowed ever slightly when she noted my spear. She took a few steps closer, tossing her brown hair over her shoulders, or at least farther from her eye.

“This is an odd place for you to be wandering… Particularly with a lance,” Beatrix said calmly, with the slightest suspicion. ‘I ask, why are you here?’

“I was looking for you,” I managed to say, taking deep breaths as I tried to keep myself calm. Eventually, I told myself, we could fight. My left hand, holding my spear, tensed.

“Oh?” Beatrix asked. She seemed to immediately note my hand tensing. “What for?”

I spun my spear about and within a second had the axe-like blade aimed at the General's throat. Apparently my eyes had become cold, for Beatrix's eye widened with surprise, but she didn't even move otherwise.
"To fight you," I replied.
"Why? I've done nothing to you. I don't even know you," Beatrix replied calmly.
"To protect Burmecia."
"Interesting way to protect your country. I've done nothing to harm your country in any way."
Beatrix's calm attitude was annoying me deeply. Where was the cruelty she was rumored to have? Where was her merciless attitude?
"You and your Queen are planning an attack on Burmecia," I growled.
Beatrix blinked slowly, yet showed no surprise.
"And who told you that?" she asked calmly.
"So it's true?" I asked.
"I never said it was," Beatrix replied. 'Why don't you go home? There is no reason for me to fight you. I have done nothing.'
"You are manipulating your Queen. You and she are planning to destroy my country!" I spat at Beatrix as she turned her back on me.
Beatrix's steps faltered, and I couldn't help but smile. She soon whirled around, her brown eyes

hard. She stared at me coldly, her eyes meeting mine in a deadlock.
“How dare you suggest such. I would never corrupt the Queen,” Beatrix replied, her voice still calm.
“Yet I saw you talk to her. I hear the people mutter things about you. They say you are heartless. The Mist Continent knows it,” I replied.
Beatrix’s calm attitude was very quickly faltering with each word I said. I saw her tense, and her eye narrowed angrily. I kept my smirk on my face, pleased to see her faltering. By then, I was not thinking properly, only thinking about a good fight.
“Those are rumors, and nothing more!” Beatrix snapped.
“Rumors can tell the truth, and these do! You are nothing but a cold— hearted murderer!” I replied.
“How dare you. I have not murdered anyone,” Beatrix replied angrily. I was pleased to see I was getting to her.
“And now you corrupt your Queen to kill more people,” I growled.
“You be quiet, immediately!” Beatrix snapped.
Within a second Beatrix had her sword drawn. The powerful saber sword, known as Save the Queen, had its tip pointed right at my throat. We stared at each other for a few seconds. Beatrix was clearly trying to calm down, but not succeeding. I was

trying to think of a final comment to truly make her fight.
“I advise you leave, now,” Beatrix growled warningly.
“There is no way I will allow you to corrupt your Queen and destroy Burmecia,” I replied, almost tauntingly.
I had not expected the results of my comment, but they quickly came.
Suddenly I was on the ground, deep slashes in my knees. And above me was Beatrix, the tip of her sword aimed at my throat.

———— Mwahahahaha! You’ll have to wait to see what happens ;) Man, I LOVE cliff-hangers…

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End of Part One

Chapter Twenty-two
The End As Is Known

I didn’t know what to think, or let alone do, when I found myself on the ground, my back smarting from hitting the ground hard, and my knees stinging from fresh cuts. The tip of Beatrix’s sword was only two inches from my throat. Her eye was hard with anger, yet she was still managing to keep incredibly calm after being insulted so much. If I was thinking properly, perhaps I would’ve given up right then and there.

But I wasn’t thinking, so there was no chance. Instead, I suddenly grabbed her wrists with both my hands, and began to try to fore her arms upward. Immediately I felt resistance, and I noticed Beatrix lift her foot threateningly. Knowing exactly where her foot would be going if I didn’t give up, I decided I’d have to be quick. I used all my strength in one burst to force her arms upward. Apparently I used a little too much force. Beatrix’s hands plowed straight into her nose.

Neither of us had expected that. With a soft yelp Beatrix stumbled backward, rubbing a now bleeding

nose. I scrambled to my feet, grabbed a potion from my pack, opened it, and drank it all in three seconds. The potion worked its magic within ten seconds, and my knees were soon supporting my weight well. I snatched my spear from the ground and dashed for Beatrix, ready to slash her throat. The only problem was, Beatrix was far too ready. She blocked the attack with ease, though her nose was still bleeding. A struggle soon began, both wanting to gain control over the other.

Yet Beatrix's mind was working far better than mine. She lifted her foot and shoved it straight into my own. I yelped, lost my resistance, and crumpled to the ground from the extreme pain. It was at this point that my mind began to register that this wasn't just a fight for fun. This was extremely serious, and I had made it that way. And, judging by Beatrix's sword once again at my throat, it'd stay that way.

I kicked upward, nailing Beatrix hard and sending her a foot in the air, then sprawled on the ground. I leapt to my feet, my foot recovering from the hard stomp she had given me earlier. I spun my spear around and slashed at Beatrix as she came up. My spear easily tore through her clothing and cut a deep gash in her shoulder. Shifting her sword, Beatrix rushed forward, but I could see electricity sparking at her sword. While spinning my spear about, I

launched myself into the air, avoiding Beatrix's swipe by a hair. Calling silently upon Lancer's power, I spun my spear about, and it began to glow slightly white. Just as I sent my spear downward, Beatrix's Shock spell came up. A powerful bolt of electricity sent me soaring into the air, the electricity crackling through my body and making me twitch with uttermost pain. Blurring vision managed to catch the fact that Beatrix, having been distracted as well, now had a spear lodged in her upper leg. Soon, however, I felt half-dead, as if I was floating.

Then I went soaring downward and landed with a horrific splat. Ribs cracked. Bones snapped. I let out a painful groan, twitching to test which limbs were still able to work. My legs gave a feeble attempt at working, but my right ankle instead gave me pain. My right arm had extreme pain, as did the right side of my chest. It didn't take me long to realize I had landed hard on my right side. With a pained groan, I fumbled through my pack, and soon took out a Cura scroll. I opened it, and mumbled the words just as Beatrix muttered her own Cura spell.

Both of us were surrounded by partles of white light. I felt the bones in my arm, which clearly had a clean break, mend themselves together painfully. My right ankle also healed itself. Most of my ribs, however, stayed unbroken; the break was not clean. I could,

however, rise, and I did manage to stumble to my feet. Still dazed, I managed to locate my spear, and stumbled when I went to retreat it. By the time Beatrix was up and rushing for me, however, I had recovered enough to block her attack.

A brief struggle ensued, and I called upon Lancer's power to aid me. My spear sparked white, and I used my strength, combined with Lancer's, to shove Beatrix backward. She readjusted her sword and rushed forward. I met her rush by stabbing her in the chest, but on the wrong side. I completely missed her heart, but definitely startled her. She was quick to react, and soon her sword was slashing just below my throat, leaving a blood cut. Deciding the attack wasn't worth getting my throat cut open, I removed my lance, leaving a bloody wound in Beatrix's chest. Beatrix ignored it, and instead began to power up her Save the Queen. Fire roared at the blade, and she dashed forward. I rolled to the side, not wanting to risk jumping, knowing I'd only be knocked high in the air again. I slashed at Beatrix's foot, causing her to stumble. To my surprise, she only twirled about on her cut foot and slashed me in the side. Flames roared and engulfed me, charring my fur and lightly scorching the upper layer of armor I wore. Meanwhile, I felt Beatrix fall with a heavy thud. I back— rolled away from the flames, wincing from

the pain in my side. Staggering to my feet, I lifted my spear to the skies.
“Power of the heavens, release the strength of the mighty warriors,” I muttered.
A dragon’s crest, much like a pentagram, appeared under a staggering Beatrix’s feet. A dragon spirit soon came from the crest and slammed into Beatrix, sending flames in its wake. It only caused Beatrix to crumple to the ground once more. I spun my spear about, calling upon Lancer once more, hoping it to be the final time. When my spear seemed to be nothing more than a shining white object, I dashed forward, and prepared to slam my spear into Beatrix’s stomach.
Beatrix’s foot lashed out, slamming into my legs and causing me to fall into a split position. Out of all things it did, hurt greatly was at the very top of the list. I still managed to thrust my spear into Beatrix’s shoulder, but the position I had ended up in was so painful and unnatural that I was having trouble getting out of it. Beatrix, meanwhile, wrenched my spear from her shoulder and held it while she rose to my feet. Painfully, I got my legs into a proper position and rose to my feet. I leapt at Beatrix, hoping to get my spear back, only to be kicked very painfully to the ground. Beatrix tossed my spear aside, and I was quick to scramble to it. Dashing

forward, her sword charging with electricity, Beatrix moved so quickly I almost didn't spot her, but I managed to dodge her attack nonetheless. The struggle didn't last long, however. The energy from Thunder Slash caused me to be knocked backward, and straight into the canal. My clothes absorbed the water, even though I was only in for a few seconds. By the time I jumped out, my clothes were soaked, and I immediately knew I would be slowed down. Yet there was something much worse that I hadn't thought of.

It was the fact that Beatrix would use Shock.

Electricity flying from her sword, Beatrix dashed forward and slammed her sword into my stomach. Shots of electricity and fire slammed into me, sending me flying backward and sprawled on the ground. I groaned, quickly fumbling through my pack. I soon found a potion and drank it, but I needed another before the wound in my stomach was no longer serious. By this time, Beatrix was upon me, and I had to roll to the side to escape her sword. By luck, I rolled right to my spear. I snatched it, and whirled around to meet Beatrix's expected rush.

Power of the heavens, send the cherry blossoms of hope, I thought.

"Power of the heavens, lend the power to vanquish,"

I muttered.
A bright flash of energy appeared in front of my hands, which held my spear. At the same time, A dragon spirit plowed through Beatrix, startling her. While she backed away from the flaming blossoms, Beatrix was soon sent flying much farther than she hoped, for the energy ball gathering at my hands had launched her backward. The General was soon sprawled out six feet away from the canal, on the other side. I heard her groan as she rose into a sitting position, and I could tell she was dazed.
This was my opportunity. I rushed forward, leaping straight over the canal, and I soon had slashed my spear across Beatrix's throat.
Yet it was right at the same time that she cast a Cura spell that I had not seen her casting. She had not been dazed after all; she had been casting a spell! I managed not to curse my frustration as her spell healed the once fatal wound I had inflicted. The wound was nothing more than a deep, yet not fatal, slash. Judging by the smirk that Beatrix couldn't hide, she had planned the whole thing. Muttering with frustration, I slashed at Beatrix's shoulder out of spite. She grabbed her sword and rose to her feet. I leapt forward, spear ready to attack. Beatrix whirled around, blocked my attack, and sent her strength forward. I had been foolish enough to leap

forward, and was sent soaring a few feet backward, and into the air. Beatrix shifted her sword, then ran forward. She leapt in the air, and I was impressed at how high the warrior could jump; clearly, she had been trained to be agile and athletic, not just packed with brute strength.

But I was also adept in the air. I spun my spear about and blocked her attack. The two of us, struggling, went soaring downward. We landed in the canal, and soon I was stuck underwater, Beatrix's weight and sword pushing me down. Bubbles floated to the surface and Beatrix, clearly having gotten a great deal of water in her lungs, released the pressure suddenly and floated upward. The pressure released startled me, but I used the opportunity to swim backward and upward. Soon, I surfaced, and began to cough up water. Beatrix was doing the same.

It was at this point that I wondered why no warriors had come to check all the noise. It wasn't like we were silent, after all. Plenty of noise had been made, from metal striking metal, to the discharging of spells. While coughing up the last of the water, I looked around, only to find no one in sight. Even in the distance, I could see no guards on the boat. Confused, I looked toward Beatrix.

She didn't seem surprised. On the other hand, she was squeezing water out of her outfit, clearly

making herself less waterlogged. I leapt out of the moat and dashed forward, hoping to catch her off-guard, but I was too waterlogged myself. Beatrix simply stopped wringing her outfit, held out her hands, and caught my spear in her hands. She pushed it backward, copying my earlier movement, and sent the wooden butt of my spear straight into the bottom of my muzzle. I stumbled backward, and it was at this point that I decided wringing out my outfit may be smart.

“Where are the guards?” I couldn’t help but ask while squeezing my clothes.

“They are told not to patrol here,” Beatrix replied casually.

“Why not?” I asked.

“Queen’s orders,” Beatrix replied coolly. She glanced at me. ‘Are you giving up?’

“What a silly question,” I replied calmly, rising to my feet and taking my spear into my hands.

Beatrix shrugged idly, and took up her sword. We stared at each other for a few moments, clearly trying to find the best way to attack. When I realized there was no good way to attack, I simply dashed forward, and when Beatrix held up her sword in defense, I swerved to the right and slashed at her thigh. I was too quick for Beatrix, and my spear cut a deep wound in her thigh. Seeming unfazed,

Beatrix moved to slam the bottom of her sword into my head, but I simply swerved to the right and to relative safety. Snorting ever slightly, Beatrix held her sword in front of her. Electricity crackled at the blade, and she rushed forward. I rolled to the side, but Beatrix proved good at changing direction, and her charged sword slammed into my thigh. The electricity crackled through out my body, causing me to tumble to the ground. Beatrix quickly had her sword at my throat, her eyes cold. Before she could even begin to tell me to surrender, however, I had slid backward, back-rolled to my feet, and rushed forward, aiming my spear at Beatrix's unprotected stomach. Almost sighing, Beatrix blocked the attack. I commanded Lancer's energy, but Beatrix muttered something under her breath.

To my complete shock, Lancer backfired, and sent its energy upon me, sending me flying backward, straight over the canal, and to the ground. Never before had Lancer backfired. Most White Magic didn't work on it since it was a Dragon Ability. Dragon Abilities were technically not magic, yet at the same time they were. Apparently, Beatrix had a special Reflect spell. Now I knew I had to be careful.

Carefully planning out my attack, I spun my spear about, yet didn't power it up with any special

attacks. I then dashed forward, spinning my spear so I could either slash or pierce with it in an instant. Beatrix held out her sword, and I expected her to be blocking a sword rush, so I prepared to pierce. Yet to my surprise, when I moved to pierce her stomach, she swooped her sword low, and my spear clashed against her sword in a shower of sparks. Cursing, I leapt backward, only to find Beatrix takings this opportunity to rush forward.

Within my mind I knew that blocking would slow me, rolling out of the way would hurt me anyway, and teleporting would allow Beatrix to get away. I was only left to jump. Therefore, I knelt down, and soon launched myself into the air. I spun my spear about, preparing to send it down on Beatrix. Below, I heard the crackle of electricity.

And, with horror, I realized too late that I was repeating a mistake I had made earlier.

Beatrix sent her Shock attack in my direction, and even when I blocked it, the electricity still had enough force to send me flying into the air. Another burst of electricity — aftermaths from the Shock — hit me, sending electricity through my veins and rendering me dazed and unable to move. I soon began to plummet downward at an alarming pace, and there was no way I could adjust my body in time.

I hit the ground with a sickening thud. My head slammed hard against the hard pavement, and my mind immediately spun. The last thing I saw was Beatrix standing over me, her sword pointed at my throat. The last thing I heard was her telling me that I was arrested for threatening the Queen and the country.
The last thing I thought was, “I have failed.” Then all went dark.

——— I hope you liked that fight, my friends. It was fairly enjoyable to write. Don’t complain about Fratley’s attitude; I imagined it as such for no apparent reason. And, finally, this is the end of Part One! Yay! So don’t expect any updates for a WHILE. I know what’s going to happen, but I need to finish Saving Freya, work on Of Monks & Demons, and update a few of the stories I have on fictionpress.com. So, with that said, I’m out.

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Part Two, Chapter One

Part Two: Chapter One
Death as We See It

Tip, tap. Pitter, patter. Clomp.

The endless noises, echoing through out the mind and getting stuck as the ultimate pattern.

Clip, clomp, clip, clomp.

Ever changing, ever different, ever distinct.

Tap, tap, tap, tap.

Different to every individual, easy to identify once learned.

Clip, clop, clip.

Suddenly ending, no more resounding noises echoing through out. Fingers tap against the stone, repeating the patterns of *clip, clop, clip, clop.*

“He resides here?”

“Yes. Has for a few years now.”

“I understand not why he was not executed the minute he was tried.”

“Queen’s orders.”

“The Queen has odd orders.”

Ears prick toward the sound of voices, both as familiar as the footsteps. Fingers continue to tap against the stone with *clip, clop, clip, clop.*

“We can’t even say his name?”

“The Queen fears that knowing his name and identity would make him remember his skills.”

“She is afraid he’d escape? I think it’s just an excuse to torture him more.”

“Death would be better for him, I agree. Is today the day?”

“Yes. Alas, so close to the Princess’s fifteenth birthday!”

“The execution of a criminal will do well for the town’s ease.”

Clip, *clop*, *clip*, *clop* go the fingers against the stone. Ears continue to listen, messed-up mind continues to process the words. The Princess’s

fifteenth birthday? It had been years then. Not that the mind would remember, anyway; that part of the mind had taken a particularly bad hit.

“Well, no bother. As long as it’s finally done, right?”

“I suppose so.”

“Don’t look so disappointed. At least we can stop this boring patrol. And I can’t wait for the play on the Princess’s birthday! It’s supposed to be another of Lord Avon’s.”

“Really? How wonderful!”

The noises resume, and the voices grow faint. The fingers no longer need to produce their own noises. Ears twitch, then become still, and finally blue eyes are lifted.

Who am I? I cannot say. They will not tell me. I just know that I’ve been in prison for quite a few years now, for supposedly threatening the Queen of Alexandria. I cannot defend myself, for I remember none of it. I don’t even remember my identity, let alone whether I attacked anyone or not. Lord Avon, the Princess, Brahne, Beatrix… They all mean nothing, and no name strikes a bell within my damaged mind. There’s nothing, it’s all empty. I can

communicate, I can walk and do things needed for daily survival. But I cannot remember a thing of any past life I may have lived.

Clomp, clomp, clomp…

It was probably about an hour before the time of the death when a new foot pattern came to my sensitive ears. It was soft, and in writing I would never be able to describe it in two words in repetition. It was most likely a *swish, clish* type of sound, but even that sounds silly, so I give up on the explanations of it all. But it was different, and I knew not what to think of it, so I simply sat on the floor, ears twitching as my blue eyes stared at the cold stone floor.

The lock on the stone door trapping me in my prison shifted. Something within the stone door clicked, and suddenly it swung open with strange, unexpected silence. The only thing that informed me of the door's opening was the wash of air that came from its swinging open. Other than that, the door kept a silent stature, moving with little reluctance to reveal a prisoner of two years.

I looked toward the door, to see who was there. I expected to see a guard of some sort, but I didn't see a guard at all. Or, so I felt she could not possibly be

a guard. Teenaged girls are normally not guards, particularly this teenager. For I saw a teenager, with long black hair tied up with a small ribbon behind her shoulders. She wore, not a royal outfit, but a yellow jumper with buckles at the legs. A white blouse was under this jumper, and she wore a necklace with a white jewel. Upon her feet were red boots, and she watched me quietly with brown eyes.

“So you’re the prisoner? The one to be executed?” she asked, watching me.

I only nodded, turning my gaze away from her and to the windowless walls of my home… I considered the prison a home, since I’d been there as long as I could remember (which was not much, I assure you).

“Yet you look so helpless. I see not how you can be a common criminal, and a wanted murderer, or at least an attempt at such,” the girl declared. I heard the distinct footsteps, towards my direction, and I knew that the girl had taken a few steps toward me.

“Who are you, and why are you here?” I asked, speaking with a croaked voice, worn from no use. My gaze continued to be away from her, as I examined the stone walls of my home, the grey

walls that had absolutely no windows, no signs of an outside world.

“Well,” the girl began. “I’m Princess Garnet til Alexandros. As for my purpose of being here… Everyone thinks you are dead. The whole Mist Continent has been given the idea that you are dead and gone.”

“But… Why?” I asked with confusion.

“You’re… Supposed to be,” Garnet answered. “I, however, have come to stop that.”

“Why?” I asked again.

There seemed to be hesitation, as if Garnet didn’t want me to know the true reason for her coming. Yet she finally spoke, if slowly and reluctantly, “I don’t want a murder before my birthday.”

I blinked slightly, finding that to be an incredibly naive and nearly uncaring answer. I immediately turned my gaze on the naive girl, wondering why she would waste her time coming down here just to stop a murder before her silly birthday. Yet within the Garnet’s brown eyes there did seem to be some sympathy for my condition. Beyond the naive nature there seemed to be true concern for the clueless, memory-deprived Burmecian that was I. Perhaps she

cared? I didn’t know. I just wished to know how she would get me out, and I was quick to express such.

“By such,” Garnet said.

And suddenly she gave me an incredibly well-aimed punch in the skull. It was at that point, as another punch made my senses spin, that I knew that princesses can punch really hard.

Faint senses barely running. Discomfort… And that distinct set of footsteps yet again. Voices like murmurs from another demension, like ghosts spinning around and around. Eyes kept close, knowing that the world spun with my mind… Prevent more discomfort. That was a goal, a distinct goal with a hurting mind.

I was not really awake, and all voices seemed far away. The jolts I was being delivered, from whatever I was tossed upon, were discomforting but barely felt regardless. I felt half-dead, like in some magical world where reality is miles upon miles away, and not a worry for anyone.

“Why, Princess! What brings you to these depressing halls?”

“’Tis awful. I was going to see the prisoner and see if he was causing trouble, and I found him dead

upon the floor!”

“My word! How is such to happen?”

“I do not know. But his room ’twas awfully cold. Perhaps he froze to death. He looks so healthy now…”

“Healthy? He is so pale… And no breaths.”

By that time in the strange conversation I had realized that holding my breath would be wise. Thus, there was no breath, and apparently I was holding my breath for too long and making myself pale in the process. But I was apparently doing a good job passing on as dead. I felt dead enough, after all; looking dead further helped my case. I did wonder, however, why Garnet feigned me as dead when she wanted no murder before my birthday. Wasn’t finding the prisoner dead just as bad as killing him? Perhaps not. Wasn’t this a silly trick, one someone should be able to figure out easily? Apparently not. It honestly didn’t matter, as long as I got out of the place and to what I thought may be freedom, though I never had known a freedom.

“And cold, too! Yes, I think freezing took him in. This is a time for cold weather, after all… Well, no bother. What will you do with him?”

“I am going to do what would be done if he was executed… I am to throw him in the mountains, right?”

“Yes.”

“Then I shall.”

“Should others not go with you?”

“I will be fine, thank you.”

The jolts began again. It didn’t matter though, for I fell unconscious from having held my breath for far, far too long. Stupidity may just be a symptom of amnesia.

I woke up to cold, and I’m not talking refreshing cold, or mental cold. I speak of deadly, unbearable, mountain cold that gets to you like a thousand knives. It revived me quickly, made me sit up with a start, and quickly regret such actions when I got a killer headache. Apparently the naive princess’s punches had jolted my mind further, and my mind hadn’t recovered. I gave my head a good shake, then blinked a bit as I looked upward.

The first thing that was easy to notice was snow, and a lot of it. Snow was everywhere… On the ground, in the sky, on me, and in my eyes. Shivering

madly, I hugged myself in attempt to preserve warmth as I looked around. No one was around. The snow was my only companion. And all warmth was leaving me as quickly as I seemed to get it. Continuing my constant shivering and teeth-chattering, I continued to look around. My eyes had adjusted to the dark, and I could make out shadows of massive structures covered in icy snow.

So this was where I was to go. I was rescued from certain death, to get it elsewhere. I suddenly wondered miserably if I would've been better off in that cold cell. Apparently Garnet had brought me to a place no better. In fact, it seemed worse. There was endless land, endless snow, and endless light. My cell had darkness, boundaries, and dryness. I had grown to like it; I didn't believe I would get used to the new life.

I rose to my feet, yet found my body to be stiff. It took a great deal of running in place and stretching to finally get my frozen muscles to thaw and work again. The cold was so great, that it seemed like I was going no where for hours on end. That, actually, was a typical prospect in my life; after all, in a prison you don't accomplish much. Yet with so much land, it seemed travelling was better… But loosening muscles had to be done. Once I felt my

muscles were as loose as they could possibly get in the freezing conditions, I lifted my gaze to try and figure out where I was.

But that was hopeless regardless, for I knew nothing. I could remember nothing, and therefore, the most I knew was that I was in a mountainous region. I knew not of the location, or how far away I may be from civilization, or what may live in the mountains. I only knew I was alone. Alone, and knowing nothing of who I was, or what anything was, or even where I was. There was no knowledge in my mind.

It was a discomforting thought.

I took a few steps forward, stepping carefully over rocks that I could see despite them being concealed in the white blanket. Ahead of me was an endless whirlwind of snowflakes being tossed about by a harsh winter wind. I could make out silhouettes of large objects, mostly rock caves or giant boulders, and an occasional ice wall. Yet there was nothing living. There seemed to be no life, no existing being to talk to, or even see. It was like a cold, lifeless desert, except with mountains of ice instead of mountains of sand.

The prison had held no people directly but me. Yet I had see people deliver my food, treat any wounds I had received years ago (though I did not remember how I got them), and keep me alive. Yet they never spoke; they had been like zombies. I could see them alive, yet they never spoke to me like I was one of them. To them, I apparently was not one of them. I was a prisoner, convicted of something I could not remember.

The prison had become a home of loneliness and confusion. I had been taken from there, and tossed into a different world. This world was colder than the stone dungeon. It held less than the bastille. By far, it was colder, more depressing, and far more lonely and confusing that the jail would ever manage to have.

I stopped walking and looked around, confused and worried. My ears twitched, trying to hear suspicious sounds, but I heard only the roaring of the wind and weather, and I heard nothing more. I saw only snow and silhouettes; the light was too bright for my eyes adjusted to two years of darkness. Sniffing the air only proved there to be the smell of thick snow. And I only felt the cold, hard-packed snow beneath my feet.

Yes, I was alone. Alone in a cold, cruel world. And I knew nothing of myself, or the world, or anything else to be known.

It was what many would call being dead while still alive.

—— TADA! I ish back! And yes, we look different! Why, you ask? I'm using HTML (AKA. Italics and such)! Good for me… Now we can actually see Italics, and the story's easier to read too, don't you think? Anyway, I know there's no real explanation for why Fratley's memory went bonkers, but I'll tell you next time if you can't figure it out. Also, in this lovely (cough) chapter I tried to explain why everyone thought he was dead and such. Oh, and I'm so sorry, but don't expect much updates. I'm going through a "My-stories-stink-and-deserve-no-updates-because-I-can't-write" phase. I should get over it within a week… Hopefully my life won't go haywire again by then. So anyway, see you all later!

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Part Two, Chapter Two

Part Two: Chapter Two

Unknown Lord

The mountains are most likely the worse place to get lost in, particularly if it’s winter. It is even worse if you lost your memory and have no idea what anything sensible is.

A fierce blizzard had chosen to come in at the time that I was making an attempt to stumble my way to civilization. The blizzard truly helped make my journey a “stumble”. Snow fell in such quantities from the sky that it appeared to be a giant blanket of snow that fell and not individual flakes. The wind helped to fiercely blow this snow about, and straight into my face. There was a dark blanket of clouds in the sky, but if you could even manage to *see* the sky, you were lucky. I couldn’t even manage to see what was a few feet in front of me, let alone the sky above. My eyes were not used to blizzards, since prisons didn’t have weather. Thus, I stumbled over anything that could be stumbled over, whether it be boulders or my own feet.

Sight problems aside, I was freezing, and weaponless. While the blizzard handicapped me, it apparently didn't handicap mountain inhabitants — and there were plenty of those. Dark shapes would become actual creatures, and thus nearly collide with me, before I'd finally realize they were there and move out of the way. Furthermore, I didn't recognize Yetis, wild cats, or even Ice Hawks, let alone know their potential danger. It took a Blizzard spell from a Yeti for me to realize they were to be avoided, and it was impressive that I didn't become a meal for the Hawks.

To put it simply, the trip was miserable, and I could see no way out of it as I stumbled along in the cold, snowy, dark mountain range. I only knew to keep stumbling along, in what I didn't realize was an westerly direction.

Luck had to have been with me that day… There's no other explanation for how I had survived the mountains, survived the cold, the monsters, and the territory. Any other person in my place, I'm sure, would not have lasted all that long. I managed to make it out of the mountains, and away from the sheer cold that it provided.

The area I came upon was flat, that was the easiest thing to see. A light layer of snow covered everything around. The sky was clear, the sun managing to get few rays through the thick mist. It was a little warmer out in the flat territory, but something told me that it wasn't any safer. Regardless, I wanted to take a break; I had not stopped once in the snowy mountains, and resting in the plain seemed safe enough. Thus, I simply sat down quietly, admiring what could be admired in the area.

There wasn't much. The plains were very much plains; they were flat for many miles, before another sheer cliff rose from the depths of the earth in the far distance. Two rivers could be seen running through the area, and right near me was a massive, ominous forest. Even I could tell that entering the forest would be certain death. Therefore, I merely looked back toward the cliff — And was stunned. For I was not the only one traveling about. There was another person, and it was impressive for me to see that they looked just like me.

Well, sort of. This Burmecian was quite a few years younger, probably a decade younger. He wore a simple, traveler's outfit, yet it was not at all like mine. He was walking at a casual pace, and I was

impressed that such a youngster would be so bold as to travel alone, with absolutely nothing, through the wilderness… Even though I was doing the exact same thing.

Soon, the child finally lifted his head, and stopped in his tracks with surprise. He was close enough for me to see that he was blinking with surprise. He then gave his head a shake.

“Holy!”

It was about the strangest thing one could shout at that time. The kid raced a few feet closer, causing me to leap to my feet in complete shock. The kid screeched to a stop, tapping his clawed toes against the ground.

“Well, this is crazy!” the kid declared in a very loud voice. “It can’t really be you, can it?”

“Who?” I asked stupidly.

Apparently the kid found it to be a pretty stupid thing to ask, judging by the glowering gaze he gave me.

“Gee, take a wild guess! Fratley! Everyone thinks you’re dead, but here you are! What’s up with that?!” the kid declared angrily.

“Fratley?” I asked, but this time my voice didn’t hold as much stupidity. On the other hand, it held surprise, for it was the first name I had heard that actually rung a bell.

“Duh!” the kid shouted. “What’s wrong with you?”

“Fratley…? Who’s Fratley…?” I asked slowly, trying to figure out why the name “Fratley” would seem so familiar. It wasn’t ringing out true, just faintly.

The kid blinked with surprise, then sighed heavily before saying, “Whoa, hold on! You can’t mean… ‘Who’s Fratley’? This is a joke, right?”

“Joke? Can’t you just tell me who Fratley is?” I asked, looking around. I could see no one else around, so I didn’t understand who Fratley could be.

“You!”

“Me? I’m Fratley?”

The kid sighed again, heavily. “Wow, this is just stupid. Yeah, you’re Fratley. Do you remember ME?”

“No.”

“Puh, you couldn’t have! How can you forget me, Puck!”

“I thought you said I was Fratley?” I was quite confused at this rate. It seemed like he was calling me “Puck”.

“Not YOU! Me! Puck! HELLO?!” The kid’s voice could get extremely loud when he wanted it to; I was learning that fact very quickly.

“Lord Puck?”

I still have no idea where I got that. Perhaps I had heard the guards talk about a “Lord Puck”, and I mistaken the kid for it. I still don’t know. Apparently the kid had no idea either, for he didn’t yell. He instead stared at me with a dumbfounded look.

“Lord…?” the kid mouthed slowly. He then remembered his voice. “Whoa… Whoa, okay, this is no good. You got the ‘Puck’ part right… But Fratley, what’s the matter with ya? Did you take a really bad hit to the head or something?”

“Hit to the head?” I asked. It rang a bell as well… Something within my mind flashed through suddenly, breaking through…

… Hit the ground with a sickening thud… My head slammed hard against the hard pavement… Sword pointed at my throat… Threatening the Queen and the country…

“Hey now! GET UP!”

I was jolted to my feet by the shouts — no, bellows — of the aggravated Puck — that, I assumed, was indeed his name — who was looking very concerned and annoyed. I stared at him with confusion, rubbing my head with light pain. The flashes of events… They were memories. I didn’t know how, but suddenly I remembered something. It was strange, and thus confounded me further.

“Yes… Yes, I hit my head,” I muttered quietly. “I fell from the sky…”

“Say what?!” Puck began, but I was on a roll.

“I fell from the sky… Hit my head on the road… There was a blade at my throat… Someone was talking, I can’t remember their words…” I murmured, repeating many of the phrases.

“Eh? You fell from the sky… Hit your head… Oh, Fratley, I get it!” Puck declared downheartedly. “I see it now!”

“Huh?” I still wasn’t the smartest person.

“You went off to fight that Beatrix lady, and got yourself clobbered. And NOW you’ve lost your memory. Oh hell, what’s Freya going to say?!” Puck declared, shaking his head with disbelief. “Can’t go back to Lindblum now! Freya will freak!”

“Freya?”

“Oh, shut up, Fratley, I’m thinking,” Puck spat, beginning to pace.

“For a kid, you sure are loud, Lord Puck.”

“Lord? Okay, I’m not a Lord. I’m a Prince,” Puck snarled. “Let’s start with that.”

“All right, Lord,” I replied, not really getting the hint too well.

“Oh fine, call me Lord then. At least you get that I’m Puck. Okay… See that forest over there. It’s the Evil Forest. *Don’t go there.”*

“Got it.”

“And there’s a city on—”

“Top of the plateau,” I finished, wanting to actually know something for once. “The princess’s

birthday is soon.”

“At least you know something. Yes, that city is Alexandria. The Princess is Garnet…”

“She helped me, you know.”

“Sure she did.” Puck, quite obviously, did not believe me.

“I’m serious.”

“Ha! You were a prisoner, right?”

“Yes…”

“Then I doubt you were helped by royalty.”

I snorted softly, but didn’t make further comment. I could tell that no matter what I said, Puck was not going to believe me at all. So I decided to let him not believe me. He could think of some other way for me to have gotten out… And he did. He never necessarily said it, but it was clear to me — for once something was clear — that he thought I had gotten free by fighting.

“Okay, so whatever. We’re going to Dali,” Puck declared. “You can fight, right?”

“Eh? No, not at all,” I replied.

Puck's jaw dropped slightly with shock. I merely stared back, and the two of us must have looked like complete idiots. Finally, Puck closed his mouth, then sighed.

"Oh God. This is bad. Well, come along now, I've got a lot to tell ya," Puck said, motioning for me to come. "Ya don't want to be stuck here, do ya?"

I definitely did not, so I merely decided to follow Puck. He apparently knew what he was doing, which was more than could be said for myself, so I decided following him would be best. Soon, the two of us were heading along the place quietly, and Puck was talking about many things that I, honestly, wasn't paying attention to. I was too busy focusing on the things he had already told me.

I was Fratley… The name rang a bell, but not loud enough to spark something. I had fought someone, and lost my memory. There was some person named Freya who would freak, and that name faintly sounded familiar. I was apparently supposed to be able to fight, but I remembered nothing of it. It was all too confusing to me. What had happened to me, and why?

"Hey! Ya listening?" Puck's voice intruded on my thoughts.

“Yes.” It was my standard response.

I could tell it was going to be a long walk…

——— Hey. I’m alive. And I’m incredibly lazy, which explains (poorly) why I haven’t updated until now. Apologies? Not really, because I simply didn’t want to write this. It’s boring me… I didn’t want to write it until today. If I wrote it when I didn’t wish to… It would’ve come out a lot worse than it is O.o And that’s scary. So… Anyway, I think I explained how he lost his memory (It was Beatrix). Now Puck has come into the scene, and he is so out of character in this chapter it makes me scream. And there’s very little description, because I couldn’t be bothered (for once; I told you I’m lazy) Oh well. I tried. And I know, this chapter is *short*. I apologize, but I wanted to give you guys something to read, to let you know that **I exist!** Okay, I’m done.

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Part Two, Chapter Three

Chapter Three

Remember by the Tragedy

A long walk… A long “walk” had been such an underestimate, such a silly thing to say. It became long week, then long months… Trying to relearn all that had been learned was a difficulty. Not many things revived the memory; not many things brought back what had been lost. For many things, it was relearning, not remembering. Many things slipped by and had to be relearned the next day because the memory was so bad. And when your teacher is a nine-year-old, it gets worse, as his impatience is evident, and you just get angry.

But it was done. The weeks spent, first in Dali. First I got to learn the way of the land. I learned that quickly enough. Then came the monsters, and the people, and the names… It was a whirlwind of confusion, and lots of times the two of us would finally have to separate before we killed each other for not understanding each other. But eventually we would be back to learning and listening to each other. It was a combined effort, and the one month

spent in Dali was a good starting point, and I think I learned more than I would ever learn anywhere else.

Then came the traveling, a true attempt to try to get everything remembered. Many things were repeated, but never recalled. “Burmecia, Dragon Warrior, Fighting”… None of it could be remembered easily. On the road constantly, Puck couldn’t think of anything that could help me remember. Things slowed down, and three months on the road were fruitless. So it was back to Treno this time. Nothing interesting there… So off on the road again. We were always on the road, always traveling somewhere, and I was barely remembering a thing…

Yes, eight months did eventually pass. That is the truly scary part. There’s nothing fascinating to say about it; just wandering, lectures, Puck’s screaming, aggravation, and ultimately a return to the mountains, for whatever reason. And of course came the ultimate happening that we both knew had to come eventually.

It was a quiet night. The black clouds covered the sky, but they shed no snow onto the ground. The air was extremely cold, so cold that not even snow could manage to fall. The ground was frozen, and it

took quite some time to start a fire. I lied on my back, staring at the black clouds with a hope to see some stars.

“There’s going to be a play.”

“Hmmm?” I had not been paying attention to Puck, and his sudden, loud voice broke into my thoughts.

Puck sighed heavily, always aggravated at my inattentiveness. “In Alexandria. A play. There’s going to be a play in Alexandria in four months.”

“What about it?” I asked, continuing to stare at the clouds.

“I’m going to see it,” Puck declared.

“We have no Gil to buy tickets,” I reminded him casually. “And no way to get Gil in four months.”

“You don’t need money or tickets,” Puck spat. “Just skill.”

“In breaking the law.”

“You are no fun. I assume you aren’t going to see the play?”

“No. I’m not interested in it…”

“Good. I’m tired of babysitting you.”

“Babysitting?” This comment caused me to rise into a sitting position, casting an annoyed glance upon Puck. “Please. I’m twenty, don’t you forget that. You’re ten.”

“Wow, you learned our ages!” Puck’s voice could not have been more sarcastic.

Silence followed as I lied back on the hard ground, staring at the clouds. Snow was slowly beginning to fall, and it was fascinating for me to just stare up at it and watch it come down in its individual flakes. I could feel Puck’s gaze upon me, but I choose to ignore him and watch the snow come down from its dark prison. A sigh came from Puck, and I heard him rise.

“Well, whatever. The point is, *I’m* going to Alexandria first thing in the morning. *You’re* not,” Puck spat.

“Aye, I’m not,” I agreed full-heartedly.

“Where are you going, then?” Puck asked.

“I know not my destination. Destiny can take me there.”

“I hate it when you start talking like that.”

A grin came slowly upon my face. “That I know.”

“Well, Mr. Philosopher, how ’bout a suggestion?”

“Speak.”

“Burmecia. Maybe *Destiny* can lead you there.”

“Maybe so.”

“So you don’t care that I’m abandoning you?”

“We shall meet again…”

Puck’s opinion was silence. The fire crackled steadily, sizzling each time a snowflake hit it. I sighed softly, slowly rising into a sitting position. I looked around at the silent night, then slowly rose to my feet. Puck watched me quietly, even as I padded a few steps in the direction of the higher mountains.

“No way. You can’t survive if you can’t even use your spear,” Puck spat.

“Spear?”

“Dope, remember last time we went to Alexandria?”

“Yes…” How could I not? Puck had nearly gotten the guards on us.

“Well, the guards had a better reason to chase me than for vandalizing. Look! I assume this is yours? It was heavy enough.”

I turned around, and was surprised to see Puck toss a lance at my feet. It had a blade that could easily be used to either pierce or to slash, and was red-rimmed. The handle was made of thick wood. It was very familiar, though the memories it brought were very faint, and quickly forgotten. I knelt down and carefully picked up the lance, as if it were pure gold. Puck grinned slightly, watching the way I handled it.

“Castles should be careful. I can fit in the sewers,” Puck declared.

“Sewers?” I gawked at Puck with shock. “You found this in the sewers?”

“NO! Idiot. I found it in their armory. What? You wanna hear how I got into the armory?” Puck asked.

“Spare me.”

“Ha! You should be thanking me. I didn’t have to risk my tail getting that.”

“How would you know it was mine?”

“It looked foreign. I know you left the Mist Continent; we would’ve found you if you hadn’t. Once I saw that bloody thing, I knew it had to be yours. I also knew if you didn’t want it, I could sell it for good cash. There goes that idea.”

“I… See.” Scarily enough, Puck seemed to know more of my past than I did. It haunted me plenty. “Well… Thank you. Maybe I can magically remember how to use it.”

Puck burst out laughing. “Oh yeah, if you get real lucky, buddy! I suggest you head on home. You can relearn.”

My opinion was a sneer, but no words. I was too busy observing the spear that Puck had somehow managed to drag through sewers. Puck was definitely amazing, and also a little insane, to drag a huge lance through the sewers. Perhaps it was his daring antics that helped us survive. Or perhaps we were just really lucky… Maybe both.

“Thank you, Puck. For everything.”

“Don’t mention it. You’ll give me nightmares.”

I rolled my eyes, sighing heavily as I leaned the lance against my shoulder. Puck was definitely one of the harder characters to deal with, and judging by

his grin, which was illuminated by the fire and made to look plenty scary because of such, he knew how annoying he truly was. Still grinning, Puck lifted his hand and waved it in a frantic manner.

“Well, go on now! You’ll have to learn to walk through out the night on your own,” Puck declared.

“I already know that. Well then, Lord Puck, I shall see you again someday,” I said, bowing lowly to the child. Puck’s opinion was muttering annoyed phrases about how he wasn’t a Lord. I seriously didn’t care either way.

Instead, I dipped my brown hat toward the child, before turning around and heading up the mountain slopes. It was slippery — that I could see, even in the darkness — but I knew it could be managed. It seemed odd, heading off without Puck, but I knew I would get used to the peace.

“Hey, Fratley! Don’t die out there. It’ll make everything I did for the past eight months a waste of time.”

I chose to ignore that comment.

Four months can be a long time, particularly if they are spent wasting your life away in small villages.

I did not end up getting back to Burmecia, when I left Puck. I was smart enough to know that was too long a walk. Instead, I spent a week traveling to Dali, to stock up on supplies… And the only way to pay for them was to help around the very strange village. It was a quiet place, and every week I was with them seemed to bring less outdoor work to do and more indoor work. It was a strange thing to do, particularly since the men always seemed to disappear during the day, and reappear at night, as if by magic. None of the women questioned it, and so I didn't either. I worked for one month on boring jobs, but got enough supplies to leave the village. From there, I decided to the massive mountains once more. And thus, for three months, the mountain villages became my home, as I worked much more interesting jobs there — Jobs that included actual labor work, from fighting monsters to lifting heavy equipment and boxes. It wasn't exactly thrilling, but it was a lot more interesting than helping in village shops. It also got me a decent amount of money, so that I soon actually had money to spare, rather than having to spend it all on supplies.

But doing such for three months is incredibly boring work, and doing labor gets boring after a while. I still remembered Puck's words about the

play in Alexandria, and I faintly remembered that the Princess's birthday was around this time. This was enough for me to decide to travel again, once again through the mountains. This time, with an old, sketchy map for help, I was able to know the way to the North Gate, to try and reach Burmecia, or perhaps just head to Alexandria… But I knew my goal, and so I was traveling again.

The winter was unforgiving. January wasn't a friendly month, particularly for travelers. The mountain slopes were icy from the constant icy rain, and black clouds were almost always in the air. On the plains and fields, I could see that the weather was impressively calm; already the mist was coming in swiftly in the lower altitudes (strangely enough, the mist was not as heavy higher up). Therefore, the mountains were most dangerous place to travel.

Yet it didn't matter, for everyone was traveling regardless. I met so many people, and so many questions, I was not able to travel as much. Everyone wanted to know where I was going, why, and why I wasn't going to Alexandria to see the play. They were surprised that I was going to Burmecia — "Who would go there at a time like this?" was a common response — and even more surprised that I wasn't interesting in the play —

“Burmecians just don’t understand what’s good” was often muttered.

I didn’t notice how much prejudice seemed to be against Burmecians, even as I continued forward. It had to be my single-minded want to get to Burmecia.

And I was getting there, slowly but surely. It was near the middle of the month when I found myself actually getting to something that seemed remotely familiar — A rare happening, but the familiarity of the mountains had to be enough to wake up something hidden within my mind. At this point, I noticed that no one was around… I did not see that it had been that way for quite some time. I was the only one climbing up the mountain at that time… It seemed strange to me that the traffic had so suddenly died…

Reaching the top of the mountain gave me a hint as to why the traffic had stopped. At the top of the massive mountain, plenty could be seen beyond to the basin… Through the heavy snow, green could be seen in the distance, and a town — my mind said “Burmecia” — could be seen. Yet there wasn’t a massive amount of green to stare at. On the other hand, there was a moving horde of strange

creatures… All heading in the direction of Burmecia.

My eyes widened, as my mind registered what was happening. It happened in a flash. The odd behavior of everyone clicked, and something within my memory came back in time for me to stumble with shock. Instinctively, without even realizing it, I clutched at my spear, while my eyes narrowed as I stared at the horde of monsters parading their way toward what I knew was my home.

There was no thought, no consideration for what to do. I only knew one thing that seemed proper, and that was to run straight downward, after the horde. There was a sudden anger, a want to protect what they were going after. I didn’t even stop to consider that I wouldn’t possibly get there in time, and that I was far too outnumbered to stand some type of chance.

I simply ran.

Destruction. All was gone. All I had run after had left. The place was destroyed.

Horror. It was the first thing to register in my mind as I came upon what I was far too late to come and protect.

Naturally, I had not run fast enough to reach the horde. I had gotten tired, had fallen asleep at the base of the mountain… When I woke up, the horde was gone, and something about Burmecia had looked different. It was then that I ran, not stopping for a rest until I had come upon the walls of a home I only faintly remembered.

There was nothing to return to, nothing to remind me. Stepping carefully through the fallen gates, I quietly viewed the destruction. Bodies of mages, humans, and Burmecians were strewn everywhere. All was in disarray, supplies knocked down, things torn apart, statues and houses collapsed. The air smelled of blood and death. Yet there, there was something living. Automatically, without thinking, I leapt, bouncing easily onto the roof, staring down at the streets. My spear was at ready as I slipped carefully onto my stomach, to try and hide myself. I expected a monster, though I barely had any idea what I was even doing in the first place.

“Gone.”

My ears twitched, catching the female voice. My eyes narrowed, staring down at the streets. I quickly saw someone… They were a Burmecian, but they were alive. It was a female, stepping slowly through

the streets with an air of both depression and anger. She wiped at a bloody cut slashed across her old face. Her purple eyes looked like they were on fire, and her army uniform was ripped, revealing burns of various kinds, of wounds of various kinds. She held in her right hand two small javelins, twin javelins. Running her bloodied fingers through her blonde hair, she looked behind her shoulders.

“It’s all gone! All damn gone!”

“An’ ya think I don’ notice?”

The accent of the masculine voice seemed familiar, though when the male appeared, he did not seem familiar. He had orange eyes, and his fur seemed darker than his companion’s. His brown hair was shoulder-length, and seemed to be in quite the wreck. His outfit, reddish in color, was also torn to reveal wounds. He spun about a simple sword, curved and sharp, before putting it into a leather sheath against his left side. Stretching, he viewed his companion sadly.

“So we, like all the others, ‘ave failed. So now what? Sit ’round, starin’ at somethin’ that’s not comin’ back?” he asked his companion.

“Everyone’s DEAD, Aireff!” the woman snapped.

“Ya like ta remind me o’ the obvious,” Aireff replied with a snort. He then sighed. “We can’ stay ‘ere. Those demons o’ whatever they were ‘ave ’eaded off, ta Cleyra probably, but the monsters are comin’ in, and we’re in no shape ta fight ’em.”

“I’ll fight anythin’ that dares come in ’ere!” the woman roared ferociously, jumping about a bit with impressive energy.

Aireff muttered something, then cleared his throat. “Anyway, the point is, we ‘ave ta get out. This place isn’t goin’ ta keep us safe anymore.”

The woman sighed again, clearly turning her gaze on Aireff. “I… Don’t want to leave. I’ve lived ’ere all my life!”

Aireff muttered something again, and whatever it was, it gained him a hard smack from his companion. He merely shook his head and looked toward the distance. I, in the mean time, was trying to sort through all the crazy memories, questions, and thoughts running through my mind.

“Let’s go ta Lindblum,” Aireff suddenly announced.

“What?! I—” the woman began.

“ROSE, face it! We’re no match for the monsters. We’re too old, damn it,” Aireff spat suddenly, clearly exasperated. “Old… Hmph, so was this place. I guess it was too old too.”

“Don’t say that!” Rose spat.

Aireff shook his head. “Come on, let’s go.”

“Go? Aireff, what if someone is still alive, somewhere? Shouldn’t we check?” Rose asked.

Aireff sighed heavily, looking over at Rose. “Ya said it yeself… Everyone’s dead.”

With that, Aireff began a slow walk toward the front gates. Rose watched him for a few seconds, then sighed, a choked sigh. She ran after Aireff with some type of desperation. Aireff merely waited for her. Soon, the two were walking off together.

“Sad.”

I immediately turned around, and was stunned to find, out of all Burmecians, Puck on the roof with me.

“You don’t even remember them, do you?” Puck asked in a voice that clearly said, ‘Don’t bother

saying, I know the answer.’

“I only know I know them,” I replied. “But I can’t remember who they are.”

“Oh yeah, they’ll be happy to hear that one,” Puck snorted, sliding off the roof and landing on his hands and knees in a rather pathetic stunt.

I followed, leaping off the roof and landing smoothly on my feet. Puck blinked with shock, staring at me, while he rose to his feet. I looked over at him quietly, then toward the gates, where Rose and Aireff had headed out.

“Uh-oh, you’re thinking of something, I know it!” Puck declared.

“I’m going to Cleyra,” I announced, rather randomly at that.

“Say WHAT?! Fratley, you—” Puck began, staring with wide eyes.

“I know where to go. I know what I have to do. I have to do what those two can’t… They’re veterans, who can’t save their country. I must save it for them,” I interrupted.

“Wha—? Okay, Fratley, you’re nuts,” Puck said truthfully.

“Puck…” I sighed. “You’re not stopping me. I’m going!”

I spun my spear around, then headed off toward the gates at a top speed. Behind me, I could hear and feel Puck’s attempts at following.

“Hey, Fratley! You idiot! I’ve only been hoping you’d make this decision for a damn YEAR!” Puck roared.

I didn’t hear him. I was already through the gate and heading off, toward the tree in the distance…

—— Okay dokey, I had fun with this one. Don’t ask why Rose and Aireff aren’t dead, they’re just lucky :P Maybe I’ll have them explain themselves later. Oh, and if I got Aireff’s description completely wrong, I apologize… Been a long time since I had to explain his appearance, and thus I completely forgot it (and I can’t find it anywhere! O.o). This chapter was tricky to construct, particularly in the beginning, but toward the end it got much easier. Sorry about delay in updates, I have Honor Classes in school… And no study halls O.o That equals no free time… That, and I think I developed FFIX writer’s block . Poo. Oh well. See you all soon!

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Part Two, Chapter Four

Chapter Four

The Ultimate Loss

I had forgotten, quite obviously, how large Cleyra really was. From Burmecia, even when the great city was decimated, the tree had appeared small. Up close, it was beautifully massive. The sandstorm that I had almost gotten lost in many years ago seemed, strangely enough, not as fierce and powerful as it had been so long ago. I felt stronger against it, able to stand up to it and approach a tree that had been so hard to get to so long ago.

Supposedly isolated for hundreds of years, this was Cleyra, a very place I had visited, but could not even remember visiting. Only a mere memory let me know that at one time, I had known of Cleyra, though I did not know I had actually gone there.

I wanted to go up the tree immediately, through the trunk and to the top as quickly as I could, so I could warn the inhabitants of danger. Yet there was one rather large problem that I had.

“Jeez, Fratley! Can’t even wait for your old pal?!”

Yes, Puck was always a problem. I sighed heavily, turning my gaze lightly upon my ever-annoying traveling companion.

“Old pals? We’ve only traveled for a year,” I retorted calmly.

“Hmph.” Puck managed that while he panted ever so dramatically on his knees.

I was extremely tempted to just carry him, but I knew that that was exactly what Puck *wanted.*

“Well, if you aren’t going to hurry up, I’m just going to leave—” I began, stepping forward.

That did it; the very notion of being stuck in front of a tree, helpless, when a huge army was coming (come to think of it, why wasn’t it there?), sent Puck onto his feet and dashing into the truck, soon far ahead of me.

I stood still, shaking my head, and unable to continue as I pondered Puck’s ever silly behavior. Finally, however, reality pressed into my mind, and I began a smooth run up the truck, fighting through the thick sand to reach the top. Behind me, I thought

I felt vibrations… Yes, the army had to be close behind. There was no time.

Never did there seem to be time in my life. I felt like I was always in some hurry, probably because I always was.

I continued to run up the trunk, avoiding most problems. I saw nothing of Puck, and his footsteps were long washed out. The kid could be a fast runner when he wanted to! Either that, or I was so winded from running across a field that *I* was the one being slow, not Puck being quick.

The second thought was definitely the answer, for halfway up the trunk I was very simply too tired to go on. I had run for two full days to get ahead of the advancing army (and passed them safely) to get to Cleyra, and running for half of the third day simply took the rest of my energy. Finally, I had to take a break, and soon had fallen into a light sleep. Deeper sleep was not allowed to come, for no matter what, I would not let myself be caught by surprise.

I woke up only six hours later, from a huge roar that made me think that an attack had started. I leapt my feet, spear out, only to see that there was no attack. Rather, it was something far worse. Right

before my eyes, I got to watch as Cleyra's greatest protection suddenly vanished without a trace.

The sandstorm vanished in a massive roar, and my eyes widened with horror. Without even thinking about my fatigue (six hours of sleep after running for days wasn't exactly fulfilling), I headed off again, as fast as I possibly could. Apparently it was fast enough, for I soon came upon the main town of Cleyra.

Everyone was in a good enough panic. Confusion, panic, and plenty of cries of "we are being punished" with other ridiculous babble were in the air. Carefully I stepped up the small staircase leading up to the main part of town, looking around for anyone familiar — a rather silly thing to look for since no one was familiar. I quickly heading to the right, going up the staircase and milling my way through a panicked crowd, ignoring questions, comments, and stunned stares.

"Fratley! There you are, slowpoke!"

For once, Puck's insulting voice was actually welcome to my ears. I immediately located the ever-loud, ever-rude child shoving his way through the crowd to look up at me.

“I would tell you what’s goin’ on, but you obviously know. So, you finally got here in time to help us in our time of—” Puck began.

“Can you be quiet?” I asked suddenly, seeing that the crowd was filing out, apparently to watch something.

“Why? Oh, the crowd?” Puck jumped in the air, trying to see over the many Burmecian and Cleyran heads. “I can’t see anything!”

“Neither can I,” I replied with a snort. “Can’t hear anything either.”

“Who could? Everyone’s being louder than the sandstorm!” Puck declared. He continued to try to see through the crowd, but then finally gave up a few seconds later. “Hell, forget it. Probably just Zidane making a scene.”

“Zidane?” I asked, feeling stupid suddenly. “Who’s Zidane?”

For once, Puck did not seem to find my question stupid. “Oh, just some crazy monkey-tailed fellow. Freya seems to tolerate him like he’s some type of old friend.”

“Oh.” I didn’t bother asking who “Freya” was, knowing I’d come up with a heavy sigh.

“So…” Puck began waving his arms around, looking around. “Now what?”

“Certainly the army has come by now. Unfortunate that the sandstorm has died,” I replied. “So we should just—”

I never finished my sentence, for an eerie, high-pitched sound had filled the air. Out of the sky came a series of rather transparent bubbles. They floated to the ground, then formed a creature that I not only recognized, but also had learned to hate with a deep passion, the hate one has for an enemy.

Everywhere where a bubble had been stood a black mage, wearing their traditional outfits and having glowing yellow eyes visible on their black faces. Their gloved hands lifted in synchronized motion. Various spells, mostly deadly fire, came upon their hands, then shot from them into the crowd of stunned, helpless Burmecians and Cleyrans. It all appeared to happen in slow motion, and I felt like I was dodging an incoming fireball in slow motion, slowly rolling away from the fireball as it slowly whizzed by me; then it seemed to speed

up suddenly and slam into the branches behind me, lighting them up in a deadly, beautiful spectacle.

Then time seemed to return to normal, and my senses were aware of everything. Puck had shouted something, then ran off. I rose to my feet, spinning my spear around the way a professional warrior did. Not truly aware of what I was doing, and relying more upon memorized movements that I had consciously forgotten, I dashed forward and slammed my spear straight into the stomach of the mage who had been preparing another spell.

He fell as if nothing more than a doll, the once bright yellow eyes on his face now dim and dead.

I looked up, looking across a peaceful village that was now becoming a bloody battlefield. Some Burmecians had taken up weapons and were fighting with what might they had, with ferocity that they had gained from remembering what had happened to their precious home. The helpless Cleyrans were fleeing, most of them only to be caught and killed by the mages who were appearing from all directions. Blood had already spilled on the ground, the bodies of Cleyrans and Burmecians strewn here and there. Very few Black Mages had fallen, their surprise attack ever too successful, ever too brilliant.

A battle cry fell silent upon my lips as I leapt forward, sending my spear straight through the head of a Black Mage. With that leap, I began to fight fiercely, half-aware of my moves, half-aware of my success.

Black Mages fell at every attack I made. Spells whizzed by me, hitting others but seeming to miss me often. The sleeves of my jacket were scorched from spells, my hat getting frayed edges from the flames as well. More mages continued to come, quicker than any of us could fight. My fatigue was gone, replaced with adrenaline, but there was no way I could keep it up. No one else could either. As I disposed of another mage, I quickly saw that everyone was tiring.

It was then that I heard voices, sounding like someone was going to the Cathedral. Immediately I leapt away from the hopeless battle, soaring over the buildings and slashing at a few bubbles, to no avail. I leapt onto the roof of a building, then flew upward again, heading toward the highest building, the Cathedral. It didn’t take long for my feet to feel the cool material of the Cathedral below my feet. Panting, I leaned heavily against my spear, watching with horror as the town of Cleyra was slowly torn apart by the fighting.

Hours seemed to pass, though it was merely five minutes, and I saw a large group of people approaching. At the lead was a person with shoulder-length blonde hair, blue eyes, and a blonde, furry tail. His outfit was relatively simple, merely a white sleeveless shirt covered by a clue vest, with blue pants, grey boots, grey gloves, and plenty of other accessories, some blue, some brown. In his hands were two daggers. I also noticed that a Burmecian, dressed in a pink Dragon Warrior's outfit, was with him, spear out and ready for use. A Qu was also with them, waddling among the refugees. Quietly I watched them, seeing them heading for the Cathedral.

Yet then three bubbles came from the air, each appearing on all exits out of the area. Black Mages soon appeared, lifting their hands in the air with a deadly cry of "KILL!"

"Dammit! I can't save 'em all!" the blonde said with exasperation, apparently torn.

"Minions of evil, you have gone too far!" I bellowed suddenly, with an attempt to stop the Black Mages' oncoming spells. It failed, but I kept on talking regardless, since I was on a roll. "My spear

will purge this land of you! You shall fall like leaves in the wind under the force of my blade!”

With that I leapt from the building, landing beside one Black Mage and slamming my spear deep into its stomach. Before it had even fallen, I had leapt to another Black Mage, repeating my attack. As the first Mage fell, and the second Mage’s spell failed, I was already on the last Mage and disposing of it. Quickly I leapt backward, gaining my feet, and looked over at the very stunned people.

“Now, run!” I demanded, seeing that the people were not getting the hint.

“Dunno who you are, but I owe you one!” the blonde said, before the female Burmecian, who apparently had something to say, could even get out a syllable.

I was already rushing into the Cathedral, the final sanctuary in the doomed town. I could hear the others following, a good thing. Quickly I managed to pull past the small crowd, soon settling uneasily near the balcony of the Cathedral. Many stares were given to me, but I merely stared back curiously. Soon, the group of people I had saved had entered, and the female Burmecian immediately began to speak, catching my interest.

“Sir Fratley, I… I have missed you so much… I began my search for you immediately after you left Burmecia. Where have you been all these years…? To what corners of the world have you traveled?” the woman said, immediately proceeding to confuse me. “My dear Fratley… I climbed the highest mountains only to hear rumors of your victories… I searched the deepest valleys only to find your footsteps. But I never found you. And in the end, I heard something… Something unbearable!”

“Freya, you say?” I asked, regardless that the woman was obviously not done. I paused for a moment, trying to recall the name, but only faintly recalled Puck bringing it up. “I believe this is the first time we have met…”

Freya’s look was easily one of pure horror. It looked like she was going to faint. I frowned lightly, concerned and confused.

“What… Did you just say?” Freya managed to get out, staring at me with horror in her green eyes.

I sighed, reverting my gaze to the ground. I tried again to remember, but nothing came up, and I soon realized that I would have to do something I truly hated to do. I would have to disappoint someone,

and greatly at that. Carefully I met Freya's gaze, taking a deep breath.

"I'm sorry, but I cannot remember you for the life of me…" I said in a strangely calm voice.

Freya's response was anything but calm. Sadness was replaced by anger, and she stepped a foot forward, fist clenched as she made a good attempt to glare me down. I returned her gaze calmly, managing to keep together under her fiery gaze.

"Y-You jest! You cannot have forgotten me! It's me, Freya! Freya of Burmecia!" Freya shouted, her voice threatening to break, and I swore I could see tears forming in her eyes.

I shifted my spear with discomfort, lowering my gaze ever slightly as I managed to reply, "I am sorry…" And truly, I was.

"No…" It was all Freya managed, and her voice had broken, her tears threatening to fall.

I merely frowned, and was caught completely off-guard by a new shout, which nearly sent me leaping backward and straight off the balcony. It came from the blonde who was traveling with Freya, and he looked truly horrified, and angry, with me.

“Hey, wait a minute!” the blonde shouted. “You can’t be serious! It’s Freya, your lost love! How could you forget her?!”

I said nothing, slowly reverting my gaze to the ground, too hurt and confused to meet Zidane’s gaze. I was truly hurt, hurt that I had hurt Freya. I wished I could remember, just a little, just something… To stop all this confusion, this pain, this disappointment that seemed to revolve around me, BE me!

“Well, say something!” Zidane’s bellow came.

“That is enough, Zidane,” Freya said, softly, in a defeated voice.

I looked up quietly to see Freya standing, dejected, defeated, and upset. Zidane was taken aback, shocked, and quickly replying, in a slightly quieter voice.

“What!? You’ve been searching for this guy for years, and now he’s right here!”

An awkward silence followed Zidane’s words. I silently mouthed the word “years”. Years? This woman, who I didn’t even recall, who I believed to not know, had been searching for me for years? What had I been *doing* with my life?

“Fratley!”

It was a good thing the Burmecian, who was dressed in very expensive clothing, had shouted my name. Otherwise I never would’ve heard him. I looked up to meet the other’s gaze in a kind of dumb gaze.

“Do you remember me, the King of Burmecia?” the man asked.

“Not at all, I’m afraid,” I replied. To me, the man was just some Burmecian with a good taste in very expensive clothing.

“Impossible!” the King declared. “Have you forgotten everything that has passed?!”

You mean it’s not completely obvious? It was the first miserable thought I came up with.

“Then let me ask you this: What brought you back to Burmecia? Is it not because you learned of the crisis here in Cleyra, whose people are our brothers?” the King asked.

This got my attention perfectly. I looked him right in the air, recovering my posture a bit. I took a deep breath, before beginning with “As a matter of fact—”

“As a matter of fact, *I’ll tell ya!”*

I managed not to groan under my breath. Puck had come to steal the scene. He soon came rushing top-speed into the Cathedral, screeching to a stop and leaping in the air in typical Puck-fashion.

“Puck!” everyone (or close to it) said in the room, me adding ‘Lord’ to the title, Freya adding “Prince”.

Puck glowered at me for a second, then looked back at everyone else. “I found Fratley during my travels around the world! And you guessed it, he didn’t know who I was! Or even who *he* was! But when Burmecia was attacked and he heard that Cleyra was in danger… His faint memories as a Dragon Knight called him back here!”

Puck always did seem to be great at making assumptions. While that was partially my reason for going to Cleyra, I *did* have other reasons. I chose to let Puck believe what he wished, though, as I turned silently toward the balcony, closing my eyes.

“Dragon Knight…” I said quietly, mainly to myself. I sighed softly, shaking my head, opening my eyes slightly as I looked at the floor with a forlorn gaze. “Yes, I was once called that… But now, that is all I can remember…”

“Fratley…” It was Freya’s voice, broken, trying to understand my situation and accept it at the same time.

I couldn’t take it. There was too much to remember, too many shattered hopes and hearts, and a city that was ultimately doomed. I then made a cowardly decision, a decision a child would make when they couldn’t stand something.

“I must go,” I declared.

With that, I leapt over the balcony, leaving everyone behind. Yet even as I flew downward, I heard a few pieces of conversation before I was out of earshot.

“Freya… You… Follow him?” Zidane’s voice.

“No… Happy… Still lives.” Freya’s voice, broken and happy at the same time.

I felt the firm ground under my feet. I made a mad dash upward, hoping to find a way out in the chaotic city. It seemed that activity had cooled down, I realized as I listened. Everything was quiet, too quiet.

“Fratley! Ungrateful idiot!”

I sighed heavily, stopping in my walk to wait for Puck. The child soon was in my view, glowering at me with such anger that I instinctively took a step back from the very enraged child.

“You can’t even TRY to remember everyone?! You can’t even stick around! Freya NEEDS you, dammit! And you just leave everyone there!” Puck screamed, causing me to back away. “Don’t you see? Everyone’s dying, Fratley! You’re all Freya has left, all that is left of her past and you… You can’t even remember!”

I didn’t reply, didn’t say anything. I simply lowered my gaze, defeated. Puck must’ve noticed, for I heard him let a deep breath out in a giant sigh.

“But I guess you can’t help it, huh? Yeah, I guess it’s your fault you had to head off and fight Beatrix… But you know, if you stayed, everyone would be happy, and we’d all be dead. Freya, you, and maybe me too… All dead,” Puck said in a strange, “let’s-look-at-both-sides” voice. It was rare for Puck, and I looked up with surprise at hearing Puck actually give something some good thinking.

“But whatever.”

Ah, I knew it couldn’t last.

“Let’s get out of here, Fratley. This place is dead now. I don’t want ta stick around, do ya? No, of course you don’t! Come on!” Puck declared, apparently thinking he could read my mind.

“Where will we go?” I asked stupidly as Puck proceeded to drag me near the tree’s edge.

“Ya think I know that?! All I know is that we’re getting OUT of here!” Puck shouted. “Don’t ya hear how quiet it is? The enemy’s gone! Somethin’ bad’s gonna happen, and I don’t want to stick around!”

“So you suggest jumping over the—” I began.

“Hey, quick way out,” Puck said with a grin.

Puck then took advantage of my shock to pull me, and thus himself, straight over the edge of the town. We fell through a series of branches before beginning a very fast, frightening hurtle toward the ground.

“Puck… Do you know what you just did?” I groaned, watching as the ground started to get closer and closer. If I could remember it, my life would flash before my eyes.

“Yup! And I still know what I’m doing!” Puck declared.

He then took a piece of paper, neatly tied by a red ribbon, out of his pocket. He ripped off the ribbon, tossing it into the air, and unrolled the scroll. He did all this as casually as if he were at a pleasant tea party, not hurtling toward his death.

“Puck…?” I began, beginning to see the details of the ground. This was going to be very painful, and I was in such a panic and so confused as to not even think to try and solve the situation… Not that there was exactly a solution to begin with.

Puck was busy grabbing my wrist while bellowing, very quickly, a series of ancient chants. As soon as he said the last syllable, the paper began to glow, burning from magic. I stared at the burning paper, then looked back at the ground with horror. It was incredibly close, and I was so busy thinking about my untimely death that I didn’t see the bright flash of light coming from the scroll, nor did I notice the sky churning with fire and revealing a portal for an eidolon to ride forward. Magic surrounded me, while a great eidolon came from the sky.

Five feet away from death, Puck and I turned into miniscule particles of matter and soared away toward Lindblum, while the powerful eidolon Odin — I could see him, despite the lightning speed and

my particle condition — came from the sky, his weapon aimed at the doomed tree of Cleyra.

—— Hello! Wow, quick update, huh? -cough— Apologies, been busy, having sinus problems and had writer's block. But now my writer's block has lifted, and within a night I wrote this piece. I wrote it tonight, so there are probably plenty of things that could be fixed, but I wanted to give you all something to work with, so you knew I didn't abandon you. Yes, I know it doesn't go along with the Purblind Chronicles. Wasn't supposed to. Anyway, hope you enjoy, while I get my thoughts together for the next piece.

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Part Two, Chapter Five

Chapter Five

Lost and Found

Lightning speed, so quickly that you can barely tell what was passing by. The entire world seemed to be spinning around me, twisting in on itself. Trees became dirt, which in turn became the sky. It all molded into one sight, a swirling array of colors that suddenly made me wish I could vomit. Swirling particles, however, do not have the ability to vomit, and it is a miracle that they could see. Being Warped in an interesting yet terrifying experience, one I hope I will never have to experience again.

After a few mere seconds passed, I felt my body bringing itself back together. I was able to feel each part of my body falling into place… First my head, then my neck, and onward, each part of my body found its proper place. It was the strangest experience, worse than the swirling world, and I cursed Puck, even as I was going back together, for not being able to do anything even remotely normal. Hadn’t we had enough time to *walk?*

Puck's laughter came to my ears, and at the same time I felt a great sensation of pain. I soon realized why. Apparently I hadn't been stable when my body came back together, and I had fallen face-first straight into the floor.

Speaking of floor, where was I? I rolled into a sitting position, feeling warm blood welling at my nose. Puck was proceeding to roll on the floor with laughter, pointing at me at the same time. A few people were staring at the two of us with almost terrified looks. One person, however, had enough kindness to at least give me a handkerchief for my bleeding nose.

"More Burmecians?" that person asked, looking at me, then Puck, who had not stopped laughing. "I see that you survived the tragedy at Burmecia… Erm, or at least physically." His gaze turned on Puck.

"It's all right… I think Puck was insane to begin with," I replied, looking at the now-bloody handkerchief with some fascination.

"Or perhaps you, Fratley! The great Dragon Knight, with some of the best skills in the world, *can't even take a Warp spell!*" Puck roared. "I love this!"

I felt that no comment would've been wise enough to offer, so I merely kept quiet. The person blinked a bit, before sighing, rubbing at his black hair. While he proceeded to apparently think, I allowed myself to get a good look at him. The most obvious thing about him was the color of his skin; it was a brown color. His eyes were green in color, and distinctly shaped like almonds. He looked quite young, probably only sixteen years. He didn't look like a native to the Mist Continent; even my memory could realize this.

"What is your name?" I asked. "I'm Fratley, as Puck informed you."

"Dominic," the boy said, looking over at me. "I'm new here, just like you I think. Just came here yesterday."

"Ya seem pretty comfortable in the middle of Lindblum's streets for someone who just got here yesterday," Puck immediately pointed out.

So that was where we were. Lindblum… The name sounded familiar, though I couldn't recall for the life of me exactly why. I looked around, and finally realized that I was surrounded by towering buildings. In the distance was a massive castle… Even though it looked like we were already in a

building of some sort. Buildings and castles within a building? Interesting, I thought, but not my greatest concern.

“Yes, Lindblum is rather large,” Dominic agreed. He smiled meekly. “I’m used to large cities, though. I passed through a few of them on my way here.”

“Ah, but they couldn’t have been half as large as Lindblum!” Puck declared.

“They were close,” Dominic replied. “Well, are you planning on sitting there all day? Get up.”

Puck and I got up simultaneously. Puck’s blue eyes widened with shock, and I too was completely shocked. I hadn’t even remembered moving my muscles to get up in the first place! Puck apparently had a similar dilemma. We looked at each other briefly, then back at Dominic, who had a sheepish smile on his face while he rubbed at his hair.

“Do you want me to take you to an inn?” Dominic finally asked, when we didn’t say anything.

“Eh… Um… Sure.” For once, Puck didn’t seem sure of what to say.

“All right then,” Dominic said, but he didn’t move anywhere. Instead, he glanced at the two of us.

Very suddenly, within one second, Puck and I found ourselves inside a building, without having moved an inch. The room had mahogany-paneled walls, matched with a soft, red carpet. A wooden desk was set up at the end of the room, and the young woman behind the desk was staring at us with shock. A book and pen were set up on the desk, apparently a place to sign in. We were in an inn.

“Okay, now Dominic has me scared,” Puck murmured.

I would’ve replied, if I wasn’t interrupted by a female voice.

“Oh my.”

“Oh crap,” Puck said, almost as if in reply. Immediately he turned his gaze upward, as did I.

On the balcony above the desk, watching the two of us with a stunned gaze, was another Burmecian, one I recognized from the ruins of Burmecia, but not from Cleyra. It was the purple-eyed female — Rose was her name, my mind reminded me — that had left Burmecia with another. She was wearing an incredibly simple outfit, merely a white blouse and brown pants. Within a few seconds she had leapt straight over the balcony and landed on the main

floor. The woman behind the desk muttered something that sounded distinctly like “Don’t you Burmecians use *stairs?”*

“So Puck, you find my son and can’t even race your arse over to Burmecia in time to tell me?” Rose spat, her voice dripping with sarcasm as she turned on Puck.

“I have my reasons,” Puck began quickly.

“‘Son’?” I muttered to myself, rather loudly.

“Thanks for demonstrating, Fratley,” Puck groaned.

Rose immediately turned on me, her purple eyes narrowing slightly. I returned her stare with my own. Her gaze didn’t soften, and when she spoke, her voice hadn’t either.

“You look older, but all the same you act like a child,” she said coldly. “No respect anymore to even your mother?”

“M-Mother?” I stuttered. Well, this was certainly a bad surprise. “You’re my mother?”

“Now you sound like you’re reciting a children’s story,” Rose said, with a heavy sigh.

“Rose, I know this looks really bad… And it is,” Puck announced.

“What happened to Fratley?” Rose muttered. “Puck, what happened? There’s something wrong… Fratley, your sister. What was your sister’s name?”

I was stuck. I closed my eyes, tightly, and tried desperately to recall a name. Nothing came up. I couldn’t even remember I had a sister in the first place.

“I… Don’t… Know,” I said slowly, defeated, as I opened my eyes.

Rose looked more shocked than upset. Immediately I supposed that the idea that I had forgotten everything was taking its time getting clear in her mind.

“Yeah, um, Rose? Fratley… Eh… Lost his memory. All of it,” Puck managed to blurt out. “Something happened with Beatrix. Got clocked in the head or something, I dunno. But it’s pretty bad…”
Rose mouthed “No shit”, but not a sound escaped her mouth. Very slowly her hands made tight fists, then even more slowly unclenched. She cast a cold

glare on me, her purple eyes able to deliver a deadly glare despite the tears welling up.

“So you survive Burmecia’s tragedy by leaving, but lose what you worked so hard to remember,” Rose said quietly. “Fratley… Good to see you alive.”

With that, Rose moved away, and straight out the inn door. I watched her leave, and was a bit surprised to see Dominic right by the door. He apparently had watched the whole thing.

“Dominic! How did you—?” I began.

“I thought the two of you may know each other,” Dominic told me. “You look alike. So I took a wild guess… And was right. Her husband is somewhere in here too. I wouldn’t be surprised if he is hiding somewhere, listening to every world…”

“Aireff is NOT a spy! Rose may be, but not Aireff,” Puck immediately declared in Rose’s husband’s defense.

“Aireff…” I murmured, the name ringing a bell, unlike Rose’s.

“Eh? Oh great, Fratley. Don’t tell me ya remember Aireff but not Rose? Rose will LOVE ya

for that!” Puck snapped.

“Aireff is a very distinct name,” Dominic said reasonably. “Rose is not. If he remembers Aireff, it will probably be because that name is so distinct, it will be easier to remember. How many people do you know that are named ‘Aireff’?”

“Eh… Yeah… But still, these are his parents! And it’s not like Rose’s *looks* aren’t unique,” Puck protested.

“Rose looks very much like a normal Burmecia Burmecian. The only difference is her eyes, and even then, the purple looks almost black. Black eyes aren’t that uncommon anymore. As for Aireff, I’ve seen him around. He’s obviously a Dari.”

“Dari? The Eoroqu Burmecian tribe?” I asked, not even realizing I was saying anything.

Dominic smiled weakly. “Like I said, Puck. Besides, how long has it been since Fratley was home?”

“Years,” Puck replied.

“Exactly. If Fratley met the Dari, he will remember them and their looks more quickly… And thus Aireff, not Rose,” Dominic explained.

Reasonable explanations were definitely not what Puck wanted. Come to think of it, Puck never likes to hear anything reasonable unless he's the one saying it. Already he was coming up with some reply, but I just becoming eternally bored, and a little aggravated. Being talked about as if you weren't even there isn't a pleasant experience. I soon was rescued from such, however, by someone grabbing my arm and proceeding to drag me out of the room. For some reason or another — I think I was too surprised — I didn't struggle.

"Ya looked awfully bored."

The accent sounded incredibly familiar.

"So ya 'eaded off an' forgot 'bout everythin', eh? It figures. Our family can never keep its luck for more than five minutes."

"Where are you?" I asked stupidly.

The reply was a weak laugh.

"Great, now ya forgot 'ow ta turn 'round too."

The grip on my arm was released, and I immediately whirled around to view the speaker. Many memories exploded from my mind as I examined him with my eyes. Before, when I had

seen him in Burmecia, I had been too far away to really see him clearly, and perhaps too distracted anyway. Now, looking upon the Burmecian, a million memories came to me, begging to be released.

“Aireff…?” I said quietly, slowly, staring at the male’s orange eyes.

The male smiled weakly. “Dominic always did seem like a smart one. Yes, Fratley, it’s me. Aireff, ye father.”

“I saw you before, at Burmecia,” I murmured. “You didn’t ring a bell there. I didn’t recognize you at all. Something was there… But there were too many memories and I couldn’t sort through any of them.”

“Do ya really expect all ye memories ta come back at one glance?” Aireff asked calmly. For someone who just realized their son had forgotten everything, he seemed awfully calm, a great contrast from Rose.

“Well… I hoped.” I ended miserably.

“A false ‘ope, Fratley, a false ’ope,” Aireff immediately told me. “Ya ’ad a poor memory ta begin with. Ya are not goin’ ta remember within a

year. It’s goin’ ta take years for ya ta remember most o’ it… And the rest, ya may never even remember.”

“Aireff, you’re encouraging.”

I turned around to see Rose coming toward the two of us, a miserable look on her face. She sighed, waving something away with her hand.

“At least you’re alive,” she said miserably.

“If only I could do more,” I replied.

“What, hit yourself in the head and hope it reverses the problem?” Rose asked sarcastically.

“Rose…” Aireff said warningly, glancing over at me.

I guess my feelings were clear on my face. Upset, guilty, helpless, and useless… All of these feelings must’ve been painted clearly upon my face. Rose blinked a bit, then sighed. She walked over and gave me a quick hug, before I could react in the least.

“At least you’re alive,” she said again, this time with more sincerity, more happiness if it was even possible. “It’s more than could be said for everyone else.”

“Everyone else?” I asked. I looked toward Aireff, the one person who seemed familiar, the one person who could bring up so many memories in a single glance.

“Ye brother…” Aireff replied.

“Brother…” I repeated the word, send it through my memories, and shook my head. Even Aireff couldn’t help with that one.

“’E’s dead, Fratley,” Aireff said slowly.

“All that’s left is you,” Rose said, then continued more quietly, though I still heard her as clearly as if she had been shouting. “And even you are gone.”

“HEY! FRATLEY!”

Puck always did know the worst times to interrupt. He did so now, charging up to me and leaping up and down in his typical fashion. It took me a few minutes to realize that he had not come from the inn, but from the street.

“You have ta come look, it’s damn awful!” Puck shouted, before turning around and making a mad dash into the streets.

Rose and Aireff dashed after Puck, and I decided that I had “permission” to go, if they were going as

well. Quickly we slipped around the massive crowds, and soon we found ourselves running with another group of people heading in the same direction. Whatever Puck had seen, many others knew of it as well, and all wanted to get a look.

After ten minutes of running, we had come upon a staircase, leading downward. We, the mob of people, dashed down the stairs, and soon headed through two sets of doors. Soon, we found ourselves out in the misty outside. Puck immediately raced to the left, and Aireff, Rose, and I followed him. The others in the crowd all went their own ways, as if not knowing where to go.

Soon, we had managed to run to the relative north, facing the mountains that separated Cleyra and Burmecia from the rest of the Mist Continent. Immediately, I could see the problem, for while my memory was gone, my eyesight was not.

Smoke was billowing over the tops of the mountains.

“Great Dragon,” Rose muttered with shock, her purple eyes widening.

“Cleyra?” Aireff asked weakly.

“Yeah,” Puck replied.

I was so absorbed watching the black smoke in the distance that I almost didn't catch the cries of people that didn't follow us. I tore my gaze from the smoke and dashed toward the cries.

"What is it?" I asked a nearby person.

"Look, sir! An Alexandrian ship in the distance!" the person replied, pointing to the distance. "I think it's almost in Alexandria, I don't know. We're lucky we can still see it! The Mist is awfully thin right now."

I followed the person's finger, and soon saw what they were staring at. There was indeed a ship in the distance, quickly being lost into the mist. Yet even at a distance, it looked familiar. The general shape of the quickly disappearing ship looked exactly like the shape of the ship I had managed to see before the Warp spell had distorted my vision.

"Alexandria…?" I muttered.

"Alexandria, indeed!" Rose's ever-familiar sharp voice replied. She soon appeared beside me, staring at the disappearing ship with disgust. "Damn them! First Burmecia, now apparently Cleyra. What's next? Lindblum?"

“Goodness, Rose, not so loud!” Aireff, who had appeared beside rose while she was speaking. “Scarin’ the people ‘ere isn’t goin’ ta do us any good. Regent Cid surely knows what’s goin’ on… He can take care of it all.”

“Burmecia… Wasn’t everyone killed in Burmecia? Everyone that was still there?” Puck asked as he walked to my side. He looked at Rose and Aireff quietly.

“Most. Some escaped here… Most, if not all, of the warriors died, however, fighting for the city,” Rose explained.

“Well, then I just realized the both of ya owe an explanation,” Puck said. “Why aren’t YA dead?”

Rose nearly choked on her own saliva. Aireff blinked very slowly, and sighed heavily, rubbing at his brown hair. Immediately Puck’s eyes narrowed, and I couldn’t help but be suspicious of my own parents. Their reactions were definitely not encouraging.

“We fought… Yes, we fought for our country,” Aireff muttered, his accent suddenly gone. “Or at least, until we realized everything was doomed.”

“Ya… Didn’t…” Puck muttered. “Did ya desert?”

Aireff closed his eyes, shaking his head. I wasn't sure if he was responding to Puck's question, or trying to clear his head. Perhaps he was doing both.

"The King gave orders," Aireff said. "After he realized all was lost, he told everyone to escape with their own lives. Most didn't, most refused. Only a few decided to flee with him. Most stayed behind, showing true courage. We stayed behind, yes, but we didn't fight."

"Ya… Hid?" Puck asked, recognition coming on his face. "Yeah, ya hid. All was hopeless and so…"

"Yes," Aireff said. "The two of us split and hid in separate locations."

"Dammit, it was cowardly!" Rose spat suddenly. "We shouldn't have hidden, we should've kept on fighting!"

With that, Rose stormed away, heading back toward Lindblum. I blinked slowly, then looked back at Aireff, my mind slowly grasping the situation. My parents were alive because they had hidden from battle, failed as Burmecian warriors (Puck's lessons on Burmecian ways, an attempt to get my memory back, had managed to stay remembered). It was a hard situation to grasp, and as

I looked over at Puck, I realized he was having trouble understanding it as well.

“That’s… Dishonorable,” Puck said slowly, making Aireff bow his head. “IF my dad’s orders had been ta keep on fightin’.”

Aireff looked up slowly, and I looked at Puck curiously. Puck’s face was struggling to keep impassive, though anger did not seem to be one of the emotions he was struggling to keep down. In fact, I realized soon, Puck wasn’t angry at all.

“But my father’s orders had been to flee with your own life, not to keep on fighting. You followed his orders… You fled with your own life,” Puck said in a strangely reasonable voice. It wasn’t common that Puck was reasonable, and even less common that he actually thought this hard.

“Ah, but it was still cowardly,” Aireff pointed out.

“To hell with ‘cowardly’!” Puck roared, suddenly no longer able to keep reasonable. “What’s more cowardly, fleeing from an unbeatable enemy, or sending a bunch of mindless creatures to do your dirty work for you?!”

Everyone who had stayed outside now stared at Puck with shock. Puck took a deep breath, apparently preparing to yell some more. For once, I found myself welcoming the child's loud voice, and it looked like Aireff was ready for what he had to say as well.

"So you fled with your own life! Did you flee before the battle even started? Did you flee and leave others to die around you, knowing that the enemy would murder your entire city? Did you even flee away from the city? Dammit, no! You went into battle, you got hurt, you got dirty! Did the Alexandrian soldiers do that? Or did they send a ton of mindless, super-powerful dolls to do most of the dirty work for them?" Puck bellowed. I immediately noticed how incredibly professional his voice and accent had suddenly become. "Who killed more, the dolls or PEOPLE? How about Brahne and Beatrix? Sure, they showed their arses. But did they even fight the armies? Did they get injured, fight those who could hurt them? Or did they attack the helpless, allowing the others to go forward and do the dirty work? Sure, that's the way of the human general, but what do Burmecians do? Their generals went forward and FOUGHT! My father STAYED with the people, for as long as he could! You want to

know who the REAL cowards are? I say it's Alexandria! They were the cowards, for using dolls to fight and for keeping all their precious people away from the bloodshed when Burmecia's people fought tooth and nail!"

A long, stunned silence followed Puck's words, the most I had even heard him say at once. Aireff's orange eyes were wide with shock. I stared at Puck with disbelief, his loud words echoing in my mind. Puck merely glared at everyone there, his arms across his chest in typical child fashion. Yet Puck was not a typical child. A typical child would not shout an entire speech without fear, would not seem so logical, would not be so immature yet mature at the same time.

"They were using strategy," Aireff began weakly.

"Strategy my arse!" Puck replied. "Mindless dolls who cast fire aren't strategy! Strategy is using your army, sending them in specific locations with a specific plan! Cleyra held a remote strategy, tricking the people, I suppose. But where was the strategy in Burmecia's battle? Sending a wave of dolls isn't strategy, it's a cheap victory!"

Another stunned, long silence followed. Aireff's mouth opened and closed, and no more words

escaped his mouth. I merely stared at Puck, unable to say anything to refute his comments. It was not necessarily because Puck was right; it was because I knew of nothing that could prove Alexandria had any strategy. To me, it seemed like sending the mages was strategy enough, but to Puck, it was just a cowardly way to achieve a victory.

“Keep your honor, Aireff,” Puck said in a much quieter voice than he had been using five minutes before. “Even though you fled, you still hold much more honor than Alexandria. They lost theirs, and it shall not be found for a while.”

With that, Puck walked away, back into Lindblum. He was obviously aggravated. Aireff merely watched him go back to Lindblum with some admiration. I also turned back to where Puck had disappeared.

“My doubts are wrong.” I just managed to hear Aireff say this, he uttered it so quietly.

Quickly Aireff dashed into Lindblum. Not wanting to get lost (it was all too likely), I decided to follow Aireff. He, Puck, and Rose were all I had found that I could trust and hope to help me find my memory again.

And so we ran.

—— I had trouble wrapping this chapter up, I was having so much fun with it. Puck's speech was particularly enjoyable, if a bit tricky to write. Yes, I remember that technically it wasn't Alexandria and all that, it was Kuja. But no one knows that… Yet, anyway. Also, I know that my timing is a little bit off, but it's not too bad, so I think I shall leave it. In this chapter, I tried to fix up the time mess-up a bit by having the Red Rose (or whatever the Beatrix's ship's name is) far off in the distance, perhaps a wee bit TOO far off. Ah, well, I'm not perfect. Don't expect many updates, as I seem to have lost my muse for FanFiction a bit. I'll try to update everything, but no guarantees. See you all, and hope you enjoyed this one!

Note: The inn I described is quite obviously NOT the inn you stay at. I couldn't remember what it looked like, so I made up my own. Also, doesn't the line "We, the mob of people" sound like the line in an important United States of American document?

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